PHILIP OYLER

The Generous Earth

'UN PEU DE TOUT'

Motto of the peasants of the Dordogne Valley

Photographs by the Author

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TO SOLDANELLA

How happy in his low degree,
How rich in humble poverty is he
Who leads a quiet country life,
Discharged of business, void of strife,
And from the griping scrivener free.
Thus, ere the seeds of vice were sown
Lived men in better ages born
Who ploughed with oxen of their own
Their small paternal field of corn.

DRYDEN

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Foreword by Lord Northbourne

Chairman of the Kent Agricultural Committee

It is difficult, although it is not impossible – as the author of this book is obliged at one point to confess – to have too much of a good thing: even of the superb wine and food which can be found by anyone who knows his way about the valley of the Dordogne river. The cheering and vivifying qualities of this wine and food are such that no strain is imposed on the powers of assimilation; they can be frankly and simply any yed, just as this book can be enjoyed, for it has just those qualcies. Indeed to miss the enjoyment, so obviously shared by the author himself, would be to miss something which is essential and not merely incidental to his theme. He describes a civilization which possesses a vitality and an integrity of which the excellence of its products is but an outward manifestation, and he describes it from within, rather than as a mere detached observer.

Here it may be desirable to confess that this foreword is not written from the point of view of a strictly dispassionate appraisal of the work it serves to introduce, in which the always intriguing subject of food plays an important part. It is scarcely possible for one who has partaken of the ordinary fare to be met with in the Dordogne valley to be wholly dispassionate about it: but it must be the ordinary fare and not that provided in the few pretentious establishments which cater specially for tourists though even that is well above the average. A noticeable and gratitying characteristic of this ordinary fare is that remarkable quantities of it can be consumed without any subsequent discomfort or even lassitude. It would be pleasant to expatiate further on this fascinating subject and perhaps to recall certain ineffaceable memories ... but space forbids, and the matter must be left in the capable and experienced hands of the author.

It is pleasant to be in a position to confirm that the author of this book is not romancing – he is telling the truth, not

only about food and drink, but about all the rest. Neither is he romanticizing: he does not pretend that the people whom he describes are all angels, or that all their arrangements are faultless. In fact in most respects they are very like us. Of course they are 'peasants', and they and some of their arrangements would doubtless be characterized as 'primitive' in a scornful sense by an admirer of modernity. They lack certain things which we have, and have got so used to that we regard them as essentials, such as modern sanitation, water-supplies, mechanical aids, and commercialized distractions. They also lack some other things which we have got so used to that we regard them as inevitable, such as the uniformity, the noise, the insecurity, and the dissatisfaction with work which characterize modern civilization, and perhaps also the fear which haunts it. They have, on the other hand, something which we lack: something very difficult to define, a fullness and wholeness of life which is far beyond considerations of mere external or social organization. This shows itself in many ways: in a sense of purpose and of everyone being in his right place, in joy in work, in honesty and straightforwardness (a visitor will find that it is superfluous and even undignified ever to lock anything up), and in the general attitude to monetary transactions which, contrary to the usual opinion about French peasants, take a place far behind mutual helpfulness, hospitality, and human relationship generally. It shows itself too in the general atmosphere of friendliness: and this is by no means confined to the human species; it is most marked in the livestock, each according to its kind, and among them the numerous and well-fed dogs naturally give themselves away more completely than the others.

If this book can be read simply for the passing enjoyment it so freely affords, it can also be read with a more serious intention. Fortunately these approaches are not mutually incompatible, and most readers will be well advised to aim at a judicious combination of the two. I have alluded to the vitality and integrity of the civilization of the Dordogne valley, and would dare to assert that wherever those qualities

are in evidence in a sedentary – as distinct from a nomadic – civilization, there will also be found a sound agriculture on which the life of the people, at least in all its economic and social aspects, will be based. Such is the case here and the contrast with our British civilization is very marked in this respect.

In this country agriculture is scarely more than one among the many businesses through which those of us who are not yet Civil Servants draw the cash wherewith to buy the things that we think we need. The mechanization and industrialization of agriculture are proceeding apace, and it is rapidly losing what little is left of its 'traditional' or 'peasant' character. It is thus becoming less and less self-supporting, and more and more lependent on international trade, industry, and transport. Now that horses have almost disappeared, nearly all the power used is imported in the form of oil; implements and beildings are mass-produced in industrial centres; even fertility is imported in the form of phosphates and potash not available in sufficient amounts in this country. Moreover, the products of our tarms go through ever more complex channels of marketing and processing before they reach the people. These tendencies have been in evidence for a considerable time, but the speed of change has never been so great as it is now. And all the time the proportion of our population living and working on the land falls.

This movement has had many consequences, of which two only need be mentioned. Firstly, food becomes increasingly standardized, preserved, and sterilized, with a loss of freshness and local character. The art of cookery declines and comes to be regarded as a drudgery to be avoided as far as possible. Yet food is very expensive and the retail price has to be kept down by subsidies, the growth of which seems to be in danger of getting out of control. The reason for the particular mention of this aspect of affairs will become apparent to the reader before he has got very far with this book.

Secondly, agriculture, which alone can provide a stable

economic foundation for a sedentary civilization, participates increasingly in the inherent instability of the financial and industrial structure. It is no longer the unchanging foundation on which that sensitive and fragile structure is built up, but it begins to share in its sensitivity and fragility which are, incidentally, matters of experience rather than of theory. Agriculture, of course, needs stability above all things; but more than this, if anything goes badly wrong, if there is a financial breakdown, if there is serious interruption of trade, manufacture or transport either at home or abroad, British farming will be brought to a standstill. The probability of such interruption is not so remote as to give no cause for concern.

The people described - whose agriculture and way of life contrast so strongly with ours - have strong historical and genetical connexions with the English: but they have followed a different path. The reader must decide for himself whether it be a better one than ours. There is, however, a danger of adopting too analytical an approach to this question. For instance, the agricultural technique of the people of the Dordogne valley cannot be considered apart from the main characteristics of their civilization as a whole, nor from their mentality, nor even from their spirituality, indefinable though this last may be. Integration is in fact the outstanding characteristic of that civilization: the agricultural technique is fitted into the whole structure. As a technique, there can be no doubt about its success, even after making allowance for the natural fertility of most of the soil. Production is maintained at a very high level in both quantity and quality, and there is room for plenty of luxuries, such as tobacco, melons, and peaches. Wine cannot be counted as a luxury, though it is as good as anywhere in the world: it is a staple product, to which all have access. It would probably be easy to prove that the agricultural technique in question is 'uneconomic'. I should like to put that view to a local inhabitant and to hear what he would have to say about it. I will say no more than this aspect of the matter is of very small importance.

It is customary nowadays to consider everything either from the point of view of economics and sociology and the modern sciences related thereto, or alternatively from a purely artistic or aesthetic point of view. There is, however, something in the Dordogne valley and its environs which lies altogether outside any such limited points of view, and that something is enshrined in its ancient churches. These have been described in many erudite works, but no description can ever be adequate. No two are alike, and almost every village has one of which at least a part is of a very early date. Some which had fallen into disrepair are being very skilfully and judiciously restored and made safe by the Société des peaux Arts, to whom much praise is due for their work in this direction. These churches constitute therefore, considered historically or artistically, an incomparable collection of 'museum pieces': but surely they are more than that.

The builders of the Middle Ages did not work as individuals but as integral parts of a spiritual organization or hierarchy. To the extent that their work was indeed directed 'from on high' (to use a conventional phrase) it was actually 'superhuman', and it necessarily remains so independently of whether or no human beings who come under its influence are conscious of that influence. Let others speculate on the implications of this in their relation to the civilization of the Dordogne valley: the inhabitants themselves would certainly not do so, for they are not of a speculative turn of mind, nor indeed do they appear to be particularly religious in the ordinary sense of the word. Nevertheless it may be that the most valuable of the many privileges they possess is that of their proximity to, and familiarity with, these wonderful churches.

There is much in this Dordogne country for the timepressed tourist to enjoy: the churches, the villages (but no large town), lovely scenery, and delicious food and drink. There is a great deal more for anyone whose needs are fewer than those of most tourists, and whose approach is less hurried and superficial and more humble. The Dordogne valley is not an earthly paradise: but for the unprejudiced it can provide instruction as well as enjoyment, and it may be that for some instruction will in due course lead to admiration, and admiration to love.

NORTHBOURNE

I. Southward Ho!

It was some twenty years ago that I found myself involved, quite unexpectedly, in the lives and activities of French peasants: to be precise those who cultivate the valley of the Dordogne and the hill-sides overlooking it, and to be more precise, those who inhabit the district between the little market towns of Saint-Céré and Sarlat, rather more than 100 miles due east of Bordeaux. Independent folk are these, as only they can be who own (like them) the land that they till. Freedom-loving are they too and icalous of that precious right, resenting the dictates from Paris (and ignoring them for the most part) as though they came from a foreign government. Rooted in the soil and lovers of it, they have preserved the traditional principles of husbandry and forestry - and in consequence the fertility and balance between water, wood, arable, and pasture, thereby preserving, too, ideal climatic conditions, for these depend upon such balance, in which plant and beast and man can live and thrive - with beauty everywhere of nature and the hand of man, with superabundance of all the fruits or the earth and indeed of fish from the river too.

How I came amongst these people would be considered a mere chance. More truly it was the leading of Providence, for I did not intend it. It happened in this wise. Some years after the end of the First World War I was asked to go out and put in order a large agricultural estate in the department of Seine-et-Marne, some miles south of Fontainebleau, for my work and delight for many years had been to bring such properties back into production. It was the sort of job that no one seemed to like, but it was entirely to my liking. As a child I found enjoyment in building farmsteads and cowpens of any odd material that a wood provided, with fir cones as cattle and acorns as pigs, but as soon as all was in order, the fun (for me) was over and I left them for others to enjoy, if they would. The joy was in the making, not in the

result. This peculiar trait has persisted throughout my life. I have planted orchards in many places and left them for others to benefit by their produce, I have planted countless thousands of trees that will profit future generations, I have built houses for others to occupy and have left thousands of acres of corn in the track of former wildernesses, and I have enjoyed it all immensely. That has been my major reward, that neither praise nor blame has or could have affected.

I was frankly surprised to hear that there was such a thing as a derelict agricultural estate in northern France, where every square yard, including the road verges, is put to good use. But there was one. The old castle, surrounded by a moat, had been held and lost alternately by French and English in the Hundred Years' War. It had suffered so much that no one had had the heart to rebuild it, but its remains, with roofs of old tiles put on, made many excellent buildings. The existing château of modern and charming design was uninhabitable, for a country mason, unaccustomed to plumbing systems, had arranged for all the wastes to pour directly into the moat. As the stream that fed the moat had not been cleaned for countless years, the château stood in the centre of a marsh that extended for a mile or more. Malaria would have been the certain penalty for anyone who was foolish enough to live there. With no inhabitants there was no one to till the land. Hence the desolation that had spread over all. Further, though there were farmstead and buildings, there was no house for a régisseur, as an estate-manager is called. So this had to be designed and built - with the stone and timber that was available on the domaine.

It was a most enjoyable job, especially as the French (and few Italians) that helped me joined in the work of reconstruction with such gusto that the whole time spent seemed to pass like some very pleasant recreation — as indeed work is for those who love it. However, when it was finished — and it was finished far sooner than I had anticipated — I realized that I needed a quiet time the excitement of planning or organizing all states in kept me from even giving a thought to the property of the property of

decided that to 'go slow' for a while would be an act of discretion.

But what to do? That was the puzzle. No form of purchased entertainment made any appeal to me. No seaside or mountain resort, to which townsfolk go, had the slightest thing to offer that I could enjoy. Eventually I decided to do in France what I had done in England as a youngster. Then, whenever I had a chance, I tramped the by-roads and field paths of my native England and learned to know its heart. Why not do a somewhat similar thing in France?

I packed my clothes in my car, together with rugs and cushions, and decided to do two things, viz. (1) to avoid anything like a main road; and (2) to go south, just south, not to any particul a place but just to keep in sunshine, as the year declined. My car was puipped with a falling front seat that converted the interior into sleeping-space for two. So the advertisement declared. It was comfortable enough for one certainly, but if two very accommodated, they would indeed have had to be close friends

My journey was a mild adventure all the time, a most happy experience. I could stop and look at any crop, could chat with any farmer, could admire any view or tree or building as long as I chose, could examine wild flowers and gaze on the clouds, where there were any, to my heart's content. In fact I set out just to enjoy everything and did enjoy it. A large measure of happiness consists in appreciation of people and things – in contemplating the good, true, and beautiful, in overlooking the reverse.

I used to stop about noon and again in the evening at any simple auberge, restaurant, or café, where tourists were unknown, knowing full well that I should find a hot meal to my liking, if I was willing to share the table of the patron or patronne, as the case might be. Bread and cheese and beer were about all that one could get at country 'pubs' in England, none of it home-produced Now such a lunch is acceptable to a hungry man and can be enjoyed by anyone on occasions, but to have it daily is quite another matter. Without vegetables, salad, or fruit a meal is sadly deficient. It is

quite otherwise in France. One feeds best in the countryside, where the food is grown (not imported) and cooked properly, for cooking is of primary (not secondary) importance in French schools. So it came about that in my journey southwards I tasted all the things that grew, all the cheeses that were made, all the wines that were produced on the spot. And frequently I had fresh fish, from a local stream, if someone had spent a little time overnight with rod and line. I have even had minnows, treated like whitebait and just as good, when a clever cook had fried a little onion and a clove or garlic in butter and added a squeeze of lemon and chopped tarragon before serving. English cooks, please note! The fish of our rivers can be made just as tasty, if a little imagination is applied to the treatment. It they have been caught in pond or stream that gives them a 'muddy' taste, they should be kept alive in a tank of pure water for a day or two, and any unpleasant flavour will disappear.

Sometimes I simply had a meal and went on my way. At others, when the company or the wine or the cheese (oh! how lovely are some of the little fresh cheeses made of goats' milk!) were to my liking, I would linger on and talk of farming, of life in general and agriculture in particular, for every countryman in France is a cultivateur. His wife or daughter or both are in charge of house, hotel, shop, level-crossing, or indeed anything that does not need the physical strength of a strong man.

The kitchen is the best place in which to eat and enjoy a meal, especially a French kitchen. As one walks in, the pleasant smell of cooking is better than any apéritif, and food that comes straight from the pan to one's plate is as nearly supreme as it can be. Incidentally I developed a great interest in the art of cooking, for such it is, and learned many a 'tip' to pass on to those who do not regard this art as drudgery.

Having lived by and on the land all my life, there was always a common bond between my hosts and myself, and I was often privileged to enter an open heart as well as an open door. Many a time, in fact, I found it difficult to pay

for my meal, so urgent was the refusal to accept my money. When I considered how a French farmer would fare in the countryside of England, if he did the same as I, I shuddered. His first visit would be his last, while I longed ever after to repeat it. I can recommend such a holiday to all those who love God's earth and do not consider modern sanitation indispensable to life, and if accommodation at night has to be found, let me say that I do not think that there exists anywhere in France such a thing as an uncomfortable bed. Never have I found one even in the humblest of homes. Furniture may be broken or even not there, a trestle may serve for a table or a sack of potatoes for a chair, but the bed will be sprung and easy for a certainty. Whatever the French like or dislike orderwise, they agree on the necessity for a good night's rest.

The meals that I shared with these countryfolk were much the same in principle. There was always soup, a plat du jour or meat course (mean or poultry, offal or omelette) with one or two vegetables, there was never a 'sweet', there was always a salad and cheese, and there was always fruit, even if it was only one apple or pear apiece. Now anyone who has studied dieteties would recognize at once that this was a perfectly balanced meal. These countryfolk, however, have not studied dietetics. They just 'feel' what is a satisfactory and satisfying diet, while we seem to consider that the main object of food is just to fill the body. I have often had (in what would be considered good British homes) a supper consisting of boiled cod and boiled potatoes, followed by a steamed pudding and completed with cheese. Filling, yes, filling to bursting-point, but hopelessly inadequate. Indeed, a large proportion of our population, regardless of income, is overstocked with starchy foods and at the same time under-nourished. No wonder that rheumatism is a rampent scourge.

Soup can be considered the national dish of France, so much so that instead of calling people in to any particular meal, the call is simply à la soupe, for that will always be on the table, even as the first meal of the day; for many of the countryfolk prefer this to the bowl (not cup) of coffee and

milk that the rest of them will take as their petit déjeuner. In either case bread will be used profusely.

Soupe, be it noted, has no meat-stock in it at all. If it had it would have a different name, bouillon, seldom served except to invalids. Nevertheless, soupe can be extremely interesting, as well as nourishing. For the benefit of those who would know its secret as practised by the countryfolk of France, here are the general principles. The stock in which any vegetable has been boiled is kept and never thrown away. It is to be found at any time on any kitchen range and very often contains some haricot beans of the white variety, for these seem to be a general favourite. It will, however, always contain one or more vegetables, whatever happens to be in season. One finds in it all that is familiar to us, but asparagus and salsify are found more frequently than with us, and on Fridays (kept as a semi-fast in some homes) the soupe maigre, a meagre thing indeed, has to be content with oseille, a sort of cross between spinach and sorrel, if such a cross is possible.

When the cook wishes to prepare her soup, she fries an onion or two with a soupçon of garlic, if she is a northerner, and a more liberal dose of this according as one goes farther south. The fat used will vary from butter in the north, goose fat in Périgord and Quercy, to olive oil in the extreme south. When frying has produced a nice brown gravy, some of the vegetable stock will be ladled into the pan, and the ebullient noise that arises will indicate to all within earshot that it is time to prepare for a meal, for when the contents of the pan have boiled for two or three minutes, they will be emptied into the hot stock. This will be stirred for some minutes, and then poured straight into a large tureen, which has in it a liberal supply of crusts of bread. Well made, such a soup can be delicious, ill made it would be terrible. It is not so simple as it sounds. Practice and a delicate palate are necessary to get a really fine result.

The first part of my journey was over the open, level or slightly undulating country that covers a major part of northern France – the country of grosse culture, of large

farms and large fields with no hedges but long avenues of trees of various kinds such as apple, acacia, oak, poplar, plane, planted by the highway authorities and maintained by them. Their produce or timber, when sold, helps towards the cost of the roads. As no side branches of any size are allowed to grow, they do not keep sunlight off adjoining fields, do not make the roads too wet, and do provide quite good timber. I commend this practice to our own councils.

There are, throughout this area, very marked differences between this and our own countryside, the main ones being the absence of hedges to divide one field from another or one farm from another, the absence of livestock, of weeds in the crops and of waste ground in which they could grow, and the absence of houses between one village and another. As these are not infrequently ten miles apart, it means a journey sometimes of five miles to work! This seems a strange arrangement, involving waste of time, but it must be remembered that F ance has had the misfortune to have belligerent neighbours on its northern boundary, that many people still living have seen their country invaded three times from this quarter, and that a population collected together in a village could protect itself better than on isolated farms. Further, the French are a sociable people and like to get together of an evening over their glasses of wine.

The absence of livestock is apparent, not real. It is there, all kinds and plenty of it, but it is seldom visible. It is all housed and the reason is this. The grasses of which permanent pastures consist will thrive under certain conditions only. They need humidity for most of the year and do not endure readily either heat or cold of any intensity. The dry air over the great corn belt of northern France does not suit them at all. Hence the whole is under cultivation on a rotation of crops, which are fed to all the stock all the year round. Such stock do not, of course, make good breeding animals, for those need above all fresh air and exercise. Consequently replacements are made from the stock-breeding districts such as Normandy, Brittany, Limousin, and Charente. But housed stock means an enormous quantity of

manure, which maintains the fertility of this belt. No straw whatever is wasted. It is all eaten by oxen or converted into dung. The crime of burning straw, as sometimes seen in English-speaking countries, is recognized as crime by a French farmer. Any such waste would spell to him the destruction of real capital, for fertility of the soil (not money) is primarily wealth.

Even the poor grass-and it is poor-that grows on the road verges is not wasted. It is on this that one sees cows, together with goats sometimes, grazing, guarded by some old person or girl knitting. Such a sight is indeed wonderful to the eyes of a British farmer. What would our cows do if driven out to cat poor grass, a few yards wide, growing between a highway and fields of corn or sugar beet with no fence or anything else to prevent them from helping themselves? They would not be on the grass at all. They would be all over the adjoining fields, helping themselves, and only an army of people would keep them where they were wanted. Yet these cows and goats will keep on this small strip of meagre herbage. It is true that some animal or other is tempted occasionally to have a bite of the corn, but when reproved by name it instantly turns away with all the appearance of a guilty conscience. We pride ourselves on our way with animals. In fact we train our pets and neglect to train our domestic animals. Hats off to those who do it not only in France but over Europe as a whole - and shame on us!

It would be idle to mention the names of the many little villages through which I passed. They would only be shown on large-scale maps. Suffice it to say that I meandered literally and often of necessity to avoid towns and main thoroughfares through the *départements* of southern Seineet-Marne, Loiret, Yonne, Cher, Indre, Allier, Creuse, Corrèze, Lot, and Dordogne. Two in particular of these villages left an indelible memory and both of them of flowers. The streets of one of these were completely *pavé*, their round pebbles so closely fitted that hardly a blade of grass could find place anywhere. The inhabitants, knowing the ways of plants, had sown seeds of hollyhocks in chinks against the

walls of their houses. These had found enough soil for powerful tap-roots to develop, and throw up stems of four to six feet in height. Covered with flowers, single and double, of all the varied colours possible to hollyhocks, they made a most beautiful avenue, the more so because the houses, built of faced stone and whitewashed, provided a perfect background to these glorious spikes. As hollyhocks are in bloom for a long time, the village must have appeared to be en fête for many weeks. Indeed there was on Sundays quite a procession of admirers from the surrounding countryside, so I was told.

In the other village of unforgettable beauty, the ground-floor rooms of each house were all some feet above the level of the road, so that the entrance to each door was reached by a flight of three or tour stone steps. On each side of each step of every house was a pot of early chrysanthemums of every shade in flower at the time of my visit. Here again were houses of dressed stone, whitewashed, providing again an ideal setting. Not so dignified as the hollyhocks, not so complete in general pageantry (for there were bare walls between each doorway) and far more formal than the rows of hollyhocks, irregular in height, they too seemed to call for a procession, votive or festive, and they too received it from the neighbouring parishes, just as we should set forth to enjoy primrose woods or chestnut avenues.

Frequently for days I had no idea where I was - on the map. True, I could know the name of each village as I reached it, for the highway authorities erect it clearly enough for a motorist to read it from a hundred yards away. In fact signposting is so superb in France that with the aid of Michelin maps one can find one's way to any place, even the smallest village, without having to ask at all. May I commend this too and the excellent and varied warning signs to our highways authorities. It would be a terrible ordeal for a Frenchman motoring in England to find his way from any one spot to any other. From town to town would be difficult enough for him. In the countryside he would soon be lost, for few villages announce their identity to the traveller.

From time to time I saw towns at a distance, but did not recognize any till I was in the region of Bourges. (Every road in Central France seems to lead to Bourges!) Once seen, that early Gothic cathedral, pure and dignified, could never pass out of memory. Its immensity is such that one feels that our Canterbury or any other of our cathedrals would look like a tiny parish church, if placed beside it. The nave, for example, is over 120 feet in height. Think of it! It seems to me that ecclesiastical architecture in both Britain and France shows quite clearly a general spiritual decline from the Romanesque (or Norman) period where one feels that life, art, and religion were one and the same thing, down through various styles whose decoration denoted a divorce of life from religion that became so complete that modern centuries have had no style of their own at all. Having but the remnants of a living faith, they have contented themselves with crecting imitations of former periods but devoid of their solidity. Bourges arose at the beginning of this decline and it has preserved much of the nobility of the 'good' days. It has not descended into drawing-room decoration, though it has substituted the pointed arch for the pure semicircular and much stronger one. The Gothic arch may point to heaven, but it does not bring that heaven to earth. That is how one farmer sees it. No doubt many critics will want his blood!

2. Hills and Valleys

Not far beyond Bourges, the great plain of central France ceases, and the land rises gradually into the hills and mountains that are called in general terms the Massif Central. A study of the map will show two routes nationales going due south through this to Toulouse. They have the appearance of two long worms and one indeed is 200 miles or more in length. They look like this because the rivers and streams of this region flow westward towards the Bay of Biscay, so that these roads have to cross (and not follow) all these. One has to climb a nule or two, descend as much, climb again and descend again, hour after hou, till one is as dizzy as if one had been on a roundabout. It is true that these roads are engineered excellently so as to make their gradients as even as possible, but it is trying indeed to drive all day round one bend after another, and sometimes hair-pin bends at that, so that the eyes have no relaxation whatever and the views, however beautiful, cannot be enjoyed except by coming to a halt.

I confess that at times I did travel a few miles on one or other of these great highways, for some of the by-roads were so unspeakably rough that travel was too unpleasant for words Wholly unmade, they were suitable only for ox-carts, for which sole use they were intended. Through most of this district only the valleys are fertile. The uplands, known locally as Causses, consist of limestone rock with a thin covering of soil and here and there a farm, where there is sufficient to make it worth while cultivating. It is very much like Cotswold country, with similar stone walls enclosing the fields, but wherever a tree can find room for its roots, a tree is growing, oak and juniper prevailing on the poorest places, sweet-chestnuts (thousands of acres of them) where the soil is deeper. Unlike the Cotswolds these uplands present from a distance a view of unbroken woodland and maintain thereby an equable climate and large flocks of sheep.

Outside of the walled fields, they find enough herbage to graze nearly all the year. Indeed local farmers assured me that anyone who had fifteen breeding ewes could make a comfortable living, even without any tilled land. This means that the sale of wool and surplus iambs sufficed to buy what was not produced. If so, the needs of such flock-owners must be small indeed, even when it is remembered that the price of all farm produce in France is and has long been maintained at such a figure that farming always 'pays' in France. It is and has been for ages a national policy to produce and consume what it needs. This policy is above politics, recognizing as it does a primary human need.

This is, however, an area where the population is sparse owing to the poverty of its soil, and the flocks of the local inhabitants can only roam a small part of these great spaces. During the summer months, therefore, one comes across occasional large flocks in charge of a shepherd. These belong to various owners in the valleys, have been collected at some agreed point, and led (not driven) up to these plateaux, where they stay so long as the grazing justifies it. Then they are led down again in autumn and returned to their respective owners. This spring and autumn migration is known as transhumance. A similar practice is carried out between the hills overlooking the Mediterranean and the mountains of Savoy, and doubtless in other places. The shepherds on these Causses receive no payment in money. Their reward is in kind. They milk the ewes and convert the milk into cheese. This comes on to the market under the name of Bleu d'Auvergne: blue because it has veins like a Gorgonzola; Auvergne because it is in these mountains and its adjoining lower hills that this type of cheese is produced in such large quantities. It is a cheese with a sting in it, when new, but gentle as a lamb (as indeed it should be from its ancestry) when mature.

Sweet chestnuts are really most valuable assets to this countryside. In spring when they are in flower, their heads with golden curls stand up above more sombre trees and brighten the whole landscape. Their timber provides excel-

lent material for construction of houses, buildings, and furniture, and the nuts are a bountiful harvest indeed. Wild boar, of which there are plenty, live and thrive on them, of course. It is no wonder that fully grown animals often weigh over two hundredweight. The farmers' pigs too have the pleasure of being fattened on them, and on the rare occasions through the centuries when cereal crops have failed, people have had to make them into bread. Collecting and preparing them must have involved more work, but the result ... well, it sounds like being compelled to eat cake instead of bread! By the way, I wonder always at the difference between the flesh of the wild and domestic pig. The sanglier is a me. Its flesh is dark in colour and has the taste of game. The domestic pig has no sign of this Was there originally a wild boar that was not game? Can anyone tell me? We can, for example, breed pheasants or old English game fowl, but cannot get iid of the game flavour by breeding, as far as I know. Of course, we should not try, for we enjoy game, but we have not lost it after many generations ot domesticity.

These chestnut woods are natural forest carefully preserved. No one would be fool enough to tell all his trees on a plot and replant the bare space with young trees of the same age that have to struggle for years against competing vegetation. Only scientific forestry can be so stupid. These peasants fell each tree as it reaches its prime, and transplant a few seedlings on the spot, if necessary, so that regeneration goes on as it has done from time immemorial, constituting one of the many great sources of real wealth in France, where I have not seen (even after two world wars in twentyfive years) a single piece of soft wood used in floor, door, or window, still less in the scantlings, in any house or building anywhere in the country. Morcover, craftsmanship main-•tains its high standard. The mason, the carpenter, the wheelwright, the joiner are still craftsmen of high order, going through a proper apprenticeship, as they did in Britain before machines deprived them of the pleasure of exercising their own heads and hands and hearts.

Just as many famous apples and pears were, in their origin, 'sports' found in woods and hedgerows, so these wild chestnuts sometimes produce 'sports' that have large nuts, instead of the small ones that are normal. The peasants take cuttings of these and graft them on to wild seedlings. The seedlings are planted where they are wanted, either like an orchard or in any vacant spot, and then they are top-grafted, as we should say, when they are as thick as one's arm, to form standard trees. They are then left to grow at will and have the appearance of being pollarded. It is from this district that we get fine chestnuts (or some of them) for roasting before our Christmas fires. But export presents considerable difficulty. When they fall in autumn, they look hard, dry, and innocent in their lovely brown skins. But put them in quite a small box, forget them for a week, and you will find that they have sweated and heated and that most of these lovely innocents will have gone bad. Safe though they appear, they must be spread out thinly to dry in the sun or in an airy shed, before they can be bagged for dispatch even to neighbouring towns. It is owing to their great propensity for heating, and the discretion and patience which this involves, that we find so many useless nuts in a bag. I know all this from disappointment. I have collected these, brought them home in the boot of my car, only to find them damp and warm to the touch in the centre of the bag, leaving only those on the outside edible.

If therefore anyone should travel through this district in autumn and be tempted to collect some of this bountiful harvest that is to be found strewing the very roads in places, let him take warning – and not only for their heating. The peasant to whom the trees belong may get heated too, if one collects these spoils without his permission, for when the produce of peach, apricot, walnut, or any other tree overhangs a road, or falls on it, it remains the property of the-tree-owner and his right to it is expected to be respected. I have watched with amusement the face of a famous farmer, member of the House of Lords, chairman of a County Agricultural Committee (who accompanied me), as he was chided

by a peasant, irate or pretending to be so, for committing the crime (yes, he actually used this word) of helping himself – albeit it was on the road where cars and carts were crushing nuts in hundreds, because they were falling more quickly than there were hands to collect them. A request to collect them would certainly have resulted in an invitation to 'T. ke as many as you like', for these folk are generous in the extreme. It is the disregard of their ownership that causes offence: Oh, noble lord, how guilty you looked! How guilty we felt, for we shared your 'crime', but how quickly your gentle apology soothed a troubled soul!

Travelling through these hills - and the valleys running into them - I experienced for the first time in my life the sensation of Long los! When the sun was not visible, I had no idea towards which point of the compass I was looking. That was something new to me and I found it a most uncomfortable feeling. But I had to get used to it, for I was in this state for several days of overeast weather. With most of the streams having a direction of east to west and with my desire being to go south, I had of course to cross them. When I crossed them I was as a rule facing south, but the roads followed the streams on either side of them, climbing steadily in gradient up the hill sides, so that for most of the time I was travelling east by south or west by south. The handle of a corkscrew is in line with its point but the line between them is never straight. Seen from the air, these roads are like corkscrews except that the twicts are not regular in shape or size.

As these hills extend over a large area, covering in fact several départements, and as they are well wooded, they attract sufficient rain for permanent pastures. From the Belgian border straight down through the centre of France to this district, some 400 miles or so, the landscape has little resemblance indeed to our own, but here with increasing moisture there are conditions in which our familiar wild flowers find a habitat. One begins to feel at home, so to speak. Often one is reminded of hilly country such as we have in Monmouthshire and the Welsh bills. It lends itself, there-

fore, to a similar use, viz. cattle-breeding. There is a little land in each valley large enough and suitable for cultivation, while the slopes up to the woodland belt make good pastures, really good pastures, thoroughly well managed. Frequently one sees steep slopes, too steep at times for an ox-team and mower to cut, carrying enormous crops of grass, which have to be mown with a scythe. These crops are produced by a form of irrigation. Wherever there is a spring of water, it is not allowed to take the shortest cut to the nearest stream. It is led in a channel on a steady even gradient across a field and back again, creating a zigzag from one side of the field to the other. Experience must have taught these peasants just how much slope these channels should have, for if too flat or too steep, the water in them would travel either too slowly or too fast for the full benefit of irrigation. The water can, of course, be shut off and allowed to follow its natural course, or turned on at will. The width between one zigzag must be gauged too, and that has to vary according to the steepness of the field concerned. It is just an example of one of many simple devices that the French, practical and artistic at the same time, offer for the serious contemplation of those who view their lives with open mind and open eyes. Doubtless in centuries past we in Britain were familiar with the principles and art of husbandry.

The Industrial Revolution destroyed that precious heritage for us. The link with the past has not been twisted. It has been broken, and we shall have to relearn our lessons, for scientific agriculture is only leading mankind into creating deserts and world-wide famine. It is helpful, therefore, to go and observe the way and practices of those who have not been seduced away from tradition.

The roads that I had been taking were to lead me, though I did not know it at the time, to a land of such abundance as I had never seen, and I shall have the pleasure of describing it (as best I can) later. Had I known what was ahead, I should have been impatient to get there. As it was, I was quite content to be lost in wooded hills and little fertile valleys. Houses were sometimes miles from their nearest neigh-

bour. Villages were no more than little hamlets, where there was sometimes a church, sometimes none, and of course only one house to serve as café, general shop, post office, and everything else. To a townsman this would doubtless be called a God-forsaken district. I must confess, however, that in no matter what land I have been. I have found that the tartner I get away from what we call civilization, the less God-forsaken the inhabitants seem to be. Unable (and often unwilling) to indulge in the pleasure that towns offer to the external sense, they have to find their joy in their work and heaven within themselves or nowhere. If we shrink at the thought of living as they do, let us search ourselves and acknowledge the reason for our reluctance. Is it not our physical condort, exernal entertainment, aesthetic pleasures that we are considering? What place have these in the Sermon on the Mount? Surely such people are rather to be envied than pitied. At least, I feel a sense of shame when I admit to myself that I should find it difficult to be content in their place, though I have lived and worked the land all my adult life, was born on a farm and have always had an aversion to towns. I ought to mention that electric light and power is and has been available throughout France, even in most isolated places, for a long time, while in plenty of farms within fifty miles of London cowmen are still dependent upon hurricane lamps for groping their way about farin buildings. If the mechanical age has produced any boon to man, it is surely electricity.

I said that this region, of which I have been peaking, is pre-eminently suitable for cattle-breeding. It is here, in fact, that the famous Limousin animals have their home. These are draught oxen, making prime beef, fawn in colour and lovely to look upon. They are trained by the breeders and sold mostly to the large farmers in the north. One sees these fine beasts almost up to the gates of Paris, and though loss of men in two great wars has compelled the use of tractors, the good French farmer, like a good British one, does not voluntarily replace horses or oxen with machines which give no dung and in the long run prove far more costly in terms of

money, as has been discovered even in the U.S.A., where the rate of wages is far higher than in any European country. For this reason we have seen London brewers replace horses with motor lorries, discard these and go back to horses, and some Fenland farmers have done the same — and that on large regular level fields, where mechanization can clearly be carried out at the lowest cost possible.

It will surprise most people to hear that a good team of oxen will plough in a day as much and as well as a good team of horses. Moreover, they will thrive and fatten on straw, roots, and a modicum of meal – a diet that would starve a working horse. In mountains and hilly country, they are quite indispensable. They will draw a load up a rough steep track with a perfectly steady pull. Horses refuse to do this. They would rush at the work and then stop, start with a snatch and stop with a jolt, break something or strain themselves – or jib at the job altogether.

The French train their farm animals to follow, not to be driven, and put us to very shame, though we claim to be lovers of animals. When an ox-team is asked to stand still, it will do so anywhere and for ever! When asked to work it will do that with equal readiness. The more I have seen of them, the more I like them for all that they are and do. If I were a young man again, starting farming in England, I should do as my ancestors did, use them in preference to horses, if I had any land (except clay) to work. Their dung is too heavy for clay but ideal for the lighter soils. I can remember hearing my father speak with admiration of the ox-teams on the South Downs, the Red Sussex cattle being, like the Limousin, exactly the right type for work.

Curiously enough, one finds another breed of draught-ox as one leaves the Limousin country. That is known as the Salaire, and is bred largely in the Auvergne valleys and neighbourhood. It is exactly like our Sussex and I wonder if it was not either imported to England or exported from there to France during the 300 years when Acquitaine belonged to the English crown. There are very many links still

existing, but unrecorded, in our history, of which I shall have occasion to write later.

All things come to an end sooner or later, and on reaching the top of one hill, I found that there was no valley in which to descend. I was on a plateau this time with little soil, scrubby oaks and juniper bushes - the land of the truffle, that deligntful fungus, shrouded in mystery. Of this too I shall have something to say later on, but I decided to take advantage of the fact that the toad I was on was for once going south over a slightly undulating terrain. Knowing that I was at least 1,000 It or more above sca-level, I was surprised to find this poor country become suddenly a facule land with good reddish hown earth and prosperous-looking farms, I might have been in any English county that has dry stone walls around its fields. The crops were the same, the wavside flowers were the same, the woods contained the same trees, oak, ash, hornbeam wid cherry, and an occasional chestnut, the houses look I like our stone houses. Only one feature was unusual. There were walnut trees planted at wide distances, but in rows, in most of the fields, and these were evidently kept pruned and open in their centres, so that the sun passed through them and the corn beneath looked just as good as in the open.

After a while I stopped, examined the crops of potatoes and mangolds (the corn had all been cut and carried), and the temporary leys of rye-grass and clover. It was difficult to realize that I was in a foreign land. The accusion was enhanced by the sight of familiar birds such as rook jackdaw, crow, pigeon, and occasional magpie – and from the air over the fields came the sweet clusive song of woodlarks, as if it were spring-time.

Names of places can be droll, nondescript, or beautiful, but their terminations are often a sure guide to their origins. For example, in Lincolnshire there are dozens of places that end in -by, such as Claxby, Raithby, Sotby, Spilsby, Candlesby, Sloothby; and many others ending in -thorpe, such as Scunthorpe, Mablethorpe, Kingthorpe, Theddlethorpe, Authorpe, Northorpe, and so on. These are Scandinavian,

'by' meaning village as it does today and 'thorpe' being 'torp' meaning a hamlet. In Kent there are many places ending in -den, such as Benenden, Biddenden, Marden, Bethersden, Iden, Smarden, showing their Saxon occupation. Similarly, when I entered the semi-mountainous country of central France, I began to see on the signboards names that ended in -ac. As I proceeded southwards these became more frequent and I noticed such names as Seilhac, Bouilhac, Chaunac, Douzenac, Ussac, Albignac, Cosnac, Noailhac, Sérilhac, Meyssac, Lignerac, Saillac, Cavagnac, and countless others, totally different from anything to be found in northern France. I was entering a district where indeed the majority of the villages and farms had such endings to their names. These indicate their Roman origin and long occupation, for the ending -ac is simply an abbreviated form of -acum, the Latin genitive plural. For example, Albignac is short for Albignacum, meaning the settlement of the Albignae or whatever their names were - just as we should speak (say) of the estate of the Robinsons.

The stone-walled fields did not continue for long, for the soil became even better and stone disappeared from sight. At a fork in the roads I tossed up as to which to take and found myself climbing steadily upwards along a most Englishlooking lane, for it had hedges on either side containing all our familiar bushes - and hedges were things that I had not seen throughout the hundreds of miles that I had come. The road was not very bad at first, but as it passed each track that led to a farmstead it became less good, and I realized after a time that I was on a lane that probably serviced a few farms and went nowhere. My surmise was right, but I was glad that I had come for it wound up to a rich plateau, from which I got a great surprise and a wonderful view. I was, in fact, standing on a large flat hill, known locally as the Puy d'Issolud, though it certainly does not deserve to be ranked as a mountain. It has, however, a very real claim to fame, for it has been identified as Uxellodunum, i.e. the place where the Gauls made their last and greatest stand against the might of the Romans. So prolonged was it, lasting for years,

if I remember, that they wondered, as I did when I read the record, how it was possible for any community to resist for such a time. I have the answer, for I have seen the spot. The soil is good, the area is large, large enough for the besieged to grow all their own food, which they could have continued to do indefinitely. The Romans evidently came to the same conclusion, and abandoned the idea of starving out the inmates. Instead they turned their attention to the water-supply, a powerful spring that gushed out of the side of this natural fortress. Eventually by driving a tunnel into the hill-side beneath this spring they succeeded in diverting it, and the brave defenders had to surrender. Roman etiquette was opposed to lathing its enemies, but they did the next worse thing, they cut off their hands!

Legend has it that the Gauls buried all their treasure before they surrendered. To test this Henry the Fourth of France spent a small for tune in getting trenches dug to find it — without result, but there is often some truth in legend, and right through the centuries, even to the present day, the ox-teams at plough continue to bring to light old Gallic coins. A number of these can be seen in the little local-museum at Vayrac.

At my feet the limestone, which underlies this whole region, ended with a perpendicular clift of 1,000 feet, and I looked out over the Dordogne valley, a mile or more across, to seemingly endless hills beyond, with the wide, clear river, still in places and with mirrored spires of poplars in it, forming islands and small cascades in others. In the valley I could see countless little homesteads, innumerable plots of cultivation. Near the river itself and on the slopes adjoining were lush-looking pastures. Up the steeper slopes were vineyards, above them woods, which reached right up to the top of the hills, wherever the sides were not too steep for a tree to find footing.

It was a panorama that spelt wealth to me, true wealth. All was bounty and beauty, God-given, and man had not descerated it. He had substituted his crops and fruit trees for wild flowers and bushes, he had utilized the river to drive

his water-mills, he had felled trees from time immemorial according as he needed them and filled up the gap with seedlings. He had in fact been wise enough to make return for aught that he had taken. If anyone should desire earnestly to know how this earth of ours can be used to serve all the needs of man without being spoilt, he can close this book and go and see for himself. I have tried at various times to convey to friends some idea of the bounty of this land, of the beauty of its villages, of the sanity of its life. Deliberately I have tried to over-paint the picture. It has all been in vain. Those who have come to see for themselves are agreed in convicting me of understatement. I can only plead that a mere farmer cannot be expected to have enough colours on his palette to paint anything, however much he may enjoy it. The truth is that all of us who live in the country appreciate the beauty that is around us but we do not talk about it, because we cannot find the words and means with which to express what we feel.

3. Arrival

I stoop for a long, and sat for a longer, time on this wonderful view-point, surveying a land of abundance, and I found it exceeding good. The desire to go south, farther south, was no longer there. In 1 rmer times I had seen the Midi and the Mediterranean seaboards, its sunshine and (alas') its aridity, its lack of comforting greenery in the summer months. It compared ill with the panorama before me bathed in the brilliant heat of September sunshine but rich in shade of man and beast. The preservation of its natural forest on the hill-sides, the wealth of fruit trees and walnut trees on the valley farms had evidently maintained an adequate and equally distributed rainfall, or permanent pastures could not be there I felt at peace. More than that, I felt at home. Indeed it was to become my spiritual home, if such a thing can be predicted of a place in this world, for it expressed in outward form a way of life with which I felt protound sympathy.

Sometime or other I had come across two books on the rivers of France by French writers. They viewed these from very different angles, but they agreed on this, viz. that the Dordogne was the most beautiful of them all. What a tribute that is! How heartily I agree with it! But I should make some reservations. Rising in the mountains of Mont Dore, it plunges its way over rocks and through gorges and can be grand to look upon. As it approaches the sea in the region of Bordeaux, it is just a peaceful wide river crossing level farmland. It is between these two, for a hundred miles or more, that is from Lali de through Sarlat, Souillac, Bretenoux, Saint-Céré, Beaulieu to Argentat, that it deserves the highest praise.

This was the home of the troubadours, but it is not for me to attempt to describe its lovelinesss. I must leave that to painter or poet. My concern is mainly with the people and their lives, into which I was soon to have an entry. Looking

across the river and valley I could see on the opposite side, and, I should judge, rather more than a mile away, three little villages that looked most attractive from where I stood and gave me a desire to see them at close quarters. They stood a little way up the hill-side, which was tree-clad above them, and of course they looked over the valley, an ideal position for a house or a village. I could see a church in each and some other big building, possibly a castle, but what struck me most was that all the roofs of all the houses looked extremely old, a sort of purplish-brown. older than anything that I had ever seen.

I decided to investigate. A thousand feet below me I could see a road winding along the valley and leading to a long wooden bridge that spanned the river. I turned my car about and after taking several tracks that led only to farms, I reached this road eventually and found myself on a small but tarred, surfaced road with a wayside restaurant in sight. It was quite a modern and ordinary sort of building, modern as compared with the villages, being only about 300 years old and of the conventional type common throughout the northern part of France. It was of the seventeenth century, in fact. It was about seven o'clock and I went in, knowing that there would be a meal available then or soon. In a spacious room where customers are or drank were two commercial travellers (northerners obviously by their speech), a long bare table, a number of chairs but no other furniture whatever, no clock, no pictures. As in Victorian days in Britain, wallpapers were designed not merely to astonish but even to stagger the beholder with their outrageous colours and still more outrageous designs, so they were in France during the same period. One sees these frequently in isolated districts, dirty, worn, with pieces torn out of them, but also, having been made to last, there they are and there they will be for centuries, if they are not covered or stripped off. They will never die a natural death!

The most obvious feature of the place, however, was dirt – not on table or chair seats, for a frequent dash over them with a damp cloth kept them reasonably clean to the eye,

but on the floor. As the surface of this seemed to be uneven to the tread, I wondered of what it was made and looked down to see. Near the skirting-boards square red tiles were visible, for no feet could stand there, but over the rest of the whole room, soil was packed in various degrees of thickness, brought in by customers, dogs, and the livestock belonging to the patron. Hens, ducks, and geese walked in and out at any hour of daylight to pick up any edible morsel and save the household the trouble of doing so. A milking-goat strolled in whenever she succeeded in breaking tether, and only occasionally was there any protest. It was certainly a family parcy. If not in conformity with civilization's sanitary rules, I doubt if anyone's health really suffered by it, for here as thi augmout the countryside of France everyone is a cultivateur, and spends most of his life in the open air, even if he is engaged in some local craft as well.

My first reaction was to walk out before anyone arrived to ask what my needs we . I did not obey it I know from long experience that French commercial travellers delight in good food and have a real genius for discovering it. I kept my eyes off the floor, took a chair at the table, so that I could look out over the perfectly lovely valley before me. I bid bon jour to the other customers, as one does in entering or leaving any little eating-house, whether it calls uself a café, hotel, restaurant or humble auberge. The two men were drinking their apéritifs and were engaged in their favourite topic of conversation, viz. food. They praised skate as it was cooked at Cherbourg and bouillabaisse at Maiseille. They put the goat cheeses of Touraine at the top of the cheese ladder, so to speak. In fact they toured Frunce and made by mouth water, so colourful and appreciative were they in their descriptions of that country's delicacies even to analysing the work of art which some ook, I torget where, created out of cocks' combs. But they made no mention of the valley of the Dordogne, where we now were. As no introductions are needed with the French, any more than they are with children, I asked what especial delight we could expect.

'Rien, monsieur, mais tout,' they replied in unison.

'Nothing, but everything?' I questioned. Then one ex-

plained this apparent paradox.

'You will find in this region no one thing that stands out supreme above others, but you will find everything to cat and drink that either gourmand or gourmet could possibly desire. You have come to heaven on earth! And you did not know it? Then you have a pleasant surprise awaiting you.'

I confessed that I did not know it and was not sure whether I was a glutton or one who enjoys good food but knows when he has bad enough.

'And, monsieur,' added the other, 'in spite of that one can ear and drink and lodge here more cheaply than anywhere else. If you are not pressé I should advise you to spend as long as you can in this district. We always do Our cars always break down here and is it is far from any town, it takes a long time to get repairs done.'

This with a wink and a very witty smile.

While we were talking a girl of about twenty, I should say, came in. She was the daughter of the house. She looked exactly like a jolly English girl, utterly different from any of the northerners with whom I had been living, and furthermore when she spoke, she spoke as bad French as we speak in any English school, when we speak it at all. She apologized for this and explained that the 1014-18 war was on when she should have been at school, and that schools in this district were not considered important enough to justify their continuance, when her country's fate was at stake and every available man was needed for practical work of some kind or another. She spoke the local pators with all the local inhabitants and had had to pick up a bit of French as best she could. But, though she had some difficulty in speaking it, none of it seemed to escape her understanding.

'Would monsieur like an apéritif? Yes? A Quinquina, Saint-Raphael, Muscat, Pernot ...?'

'No, thanks,' I said. 'None of these concoctions. I've got an appetite and it needs no stimulus. Just give me a natural vin du pays, white or red, please.'

'May I make a suggestion, monsieur?' asked one of the men.

'Certainly,' I said. 'I'm sure that you know what is good.'

"Then bring for monsieur some Queyssac.' He said to the girl, 'It is a benediction, is it not, Nancy?'

It was indeed, so much so that I determined later to climb the height upon which this bottled sunshine was produced, and shall have something to say about it later.

'But did I hear correctly?' I asked her. 'Is your name really Nancy? Yes? And that was your grandmother's name and her grandmother's? And there are other girls in the district who are also called Nancy, such as Nancy Chapou and Nancy Lermon? But,' I protested, 'Nancy is an English name, not French.' have nover heard it in France before, and so is Lambert for that matter.'

An English looking girl with an English name in a French port on the Chantel might not be a surprise, but here 500 miles south of England and 150 miles inland and far from any town . . . well, that puzzled me and interested me. Like many others, my family could trace its ancestors back to France (to Provence, to be precise). Perhaps the reverse was to be found to account for these English names.

My speculation was cut short by the arrival of dinner. As I had been given to expect a good meal and felt like doing full justice to it I made careful note of the menu. Here it is:

Soup

Pâté of wild boar (with truffles in it) and sliced tomatoes and onions

Chicken à la cocotte with salsify Mutton with harieots and salad Goose with carrots Choice of three cheeses Grapes, figs, and melon

This was the sort of meal that was served every Sunday and market days. On other days there was only one kind of poultry but on those occasions tresh fish often appeared instead. I have had dace, trout, bream, crayfish, barbel, and others; all good, as the river is clear and clean, running over rocks or pebbles, a perfect natural filter of any waste that goes into it. We ordered no wine, for that was put on the table automatically, so to speak — a carafe of red wine for each of us, and with the fruit appeared a bottle of white wine for us to share. Cognac was served with the coffee. We ordered none of these drinks. They were there for us to take or leave. We paid for our apératifs separately. The white wine was a concession to Sundays and market days. For the rest of the week one had to be content with a full-sized bottle of red wine per person per meal!

The price of this meal, wine included, was 14 francs. At that time the exchange rate was 125 francs to the pound sterling, so the cost was about two shillings and fourpence. As I could only consume about half the food and less than half my ration of wine, I was only charged eight francs!

It all sounds incredible, but it is the same today as it was then and will be tomorrow, because it is all produced locally, the only difference being the adjustment of price to meet the devaluation of the franc. The meals are still as lavish and luxurious, the price is still far below that of anywhere else, and the 'locals' can still consume the whole, both food and drink, and consider it quite a normal repast! But it must take years of training to make one's stomach elastic enough to hold it!

It is, however, not merely the quantity but also the quality that astounds. Each dish is flavoured so exquisitely that one is tempted to become a gourmand even against one's better sense. Part of the secret is the judicious use of walnut oil and/or goose fat, but that is not all. The fundamental reason is, of course, that the people themselves revel in good food, and the love of something, anything in fact, is the main requirement for producing it. I confess that on each occasion that I return, after absence, to this region of super-abundance, for such it is, I find that after a few days I have to have a 'fast' day or two, for I have not the power to resist taking more food and drink than I really need, for temptation is there too in the form of wine just as much as in the

menu. I find no difficulty whatever in restricting myself to the use (and not abuse) of any Bordeaux wine, for example, no matter how famous its name. Not so with the bottle that comes to the table for any and every workman who drops in for a meal at these little auberges in the upland villages or riverside cafés of the Dordogne valley This country wine, known as a rule by the general name of vin de Cahors, is grown mainly on the hills between the valleys of the Lot and the Dordogne, and is altogether too much to my liking Possibly this is only a personal taste, but I find that I enjoy the wine of grapes that are grown on hill sides and find little interest in those grown on plains. The difference is very marked For example, Bergeric produces what would be called a good write dessert wine, but the same grape growing on the slopes enouging, viz at Monbazillac, produces something superb in another and higher class altogether So does the red wine from the slopes of Domme surplies anything prich ed on the rich alluvial valley below it

When at some future time I tool courage and mentioned my predilection, I found that there was general agreement among the peasants and that was why those whose farms were in the valley had plots for their vines on the hill-sides. As a matter of fact I doubt if any really good wine ever gets to I ngl ind or (for that matter) to Paris I once asked a merchant with whom I deal when I am in the Dordogne valley a connoisscur, if ever there was one to let me have a few bottles of the best Monbazillac, ie premier grand eru We had tisted it together in his cellar and had found (wonder of wonders) that the 1919, vintage ontained twenty per cent of alconol, a most unusual thing. The wine did not arrive when expected, so I went to fetch it. I did not get it then. He refused to bottle until the weather was still, fine, and free from any vestige of disturbance whatever or the wine would lose in character, he said. He further told me that, though it was safe when once bottled, it would never taste the same when I drank it in England, because it would not like the climate, and that, if I opened a bottle when there was thundery weather at Monbazillac (where it was born), I should be disappointed at its taste. So sensitive is good winc.

He was perfectly right. It never tastes so good in England and can, at times, be only a poor edition of its true self, though it is all from the same cask and was bottled at the same time

If anyone has had the pleasure of cating Cheddar cheese in a Somersetshire farmhouse, where cheese is made and has been made for generations, not for sale, but for household use, he will know what good Cheddar cheese is and how different it is from the commercial article that has a similar name. And if anyone has the pleasure of drinking wine that the producer makes for his own use, he will find an equally great difference, and let him not imagine that this only applies to the châteaux with famous names. In the cave of many a peasant there are wines and brandy beyond compare. It is personal attention to every detail that counts in the making of cheese or wine or anything else. For that reason the large estate or the factory is certain to fall short of the best.

It was here that I was introduced to an unusual and interesting custom. Every inhabitant of the district began his meal with what is called a chabrol. When he has consumed the major portion of his soup, he pours some of his red wine into it, gives it a stir with his spoon, and then drinks the mixture out of the plate. For this reason the local soup plates are made without a flat edge and so it is as easy to drink from it, as it is from a bowl. None would dream of failing to do this. It is almost a religious ceremony. I saw once a workman, who was engaged excitedly in a conversation, finish his soup without drinking his chabrol. When he realized what he had done, he became serious, looked distressed and asked for some more soup at once, so that he could perform his ritual. He believed veritably, as is general, that his health or his well-being would suffer otherwise. As I have found that it does no harm, even if it does no good, to 'do in Rome as Rome does', I have followed this custom , and confess that (to my surprise) I have found it very pleasant. I commend it, but not with an ordinary soup plate, unless one likes to have soup all over one's face and clothes!

Though France as a whole has over forty per cent of its populace on the land, while we have only six, it too has telt a lack of tillers of the soil. In each world war many men were lost as casualties and others did not return to their countryside, preferring the life of towns. This has meant a loss in many ways and especially in the matter of really nice wine, for this is grown, as I have said, on slopes, some so steep that I have stood and stretched out my hand and touched the rising land in front of me. Cultivation of such and even fairly steep slopes must, of necessity, be done entirely by hand, and when there are not enough workers, these vineyards have to be allowed to go out of cultivation, and only those remain which can be managed by oxen, horses, or tractor. I have seen, alas! hundreds of acres abandoned during the past eventy years, though of course many remain still, where families have not suffered loss, and where sons and daughters have remained loyal to the land.

A meal in France is a thing to be enjoyed. It is not just so many calories put into a human frame as quickly as possible, and it would be idle to go into any restaurant and say that one was in a hurry. That would be incredible, Indeed the standard break for lunch, as far as the countryside and country towns are concerned, is two hours. The basic reason for this is that it takes a horse that length of time to have a proper feed. A common working day is arranged like this. Work from 6 to 11, break of two hours, work from 1 to 6. This is arranged to get the required amount of work done and yet give time for the relaxation necessary to man and beast. About half-way between these five-hour spells, it is the custom to stop and have a cassecroûte with a drink of wine The long rolls enable one literally to 'break crust', for these consist of thin crackly crust wrapped round a yard of nearair! During those two hours, necessary for the animals, the workers have time for a proper cooked ineal, a rest, and some banter as a digestive, or a song. This is in complete contrast to Britain, where work on a farm has become, owing to mechanization, very similar to that of a factory – the sooner it is over, the better; because there is no pleasure in it, or little anyway. It is sad, but where money is the basis of life,

joy will sit with drooping head.

Someone has said that 'two's company, three's a crowd'. It certainly sounds like that, when there are only three French people talking at a meal. The two commercial travellers and Nancy provided me with an entertainment denied to any stage. Oh! Pity the stage! What a feeble thing it is beside the real comedies of life. Their gestures and their infinite changes of expression would have delighted anyone who did not understand a single one of their witty sallies in words. By the time that dessert arrived and wine had made their merry hearts still merrier, the conversation drifted quite naturally to amour and the men were asking Nancy with whom of the two she was going to sleep, each proclaiming himself the most handsome! She, matching their banter, was quite equal to the occasion, said that a man (no less than a woman) had not only a face but also a body, and that, if they both took off all their clothes, she would decide on the spot! At this interesting moment, the banter was interrupted by the entry of several peasants who often came in for an evening's drank. But let me say that this is the way of lovemaking in France. It is not a sickly sentimental thing but a joyous expression of a normal and natural need of man and woman. It is not associated with marriage, which is a serious thing, a social responsibility undertaken with the definite aim of having children and bringing them up well. A loyal wife of an equally loyal husband would not expect that husband, if he were away from home for any length of time, to practise celibacy any more than she would expect him to go without food and drink. I have known a splendid mother whose husband was called to the Services and had of course only a miserable pay, send him money regularly so that he could afford to have a nice, clean, wholesome woman, and when any Frenchman from the north (his speech betrays him) comes alone to this district and requests a room, he

will be asked quite naturally and openly for all to hear whether he wants it sans ou avec, meaning with or without a woman. The assumption is that the traveller from the north has been away from home for some time.

When the peasants arrived, the conversation changed in two ways viz. from love-making to farming and from French to the local patois. The commercial travellers were at a loss with both. Odd French words connected with the land cropped up in their talk and gave me a clue, and we soon found that they could speak French, or rather, what passes for such in their eyes. I found out in fact that the vintage was about to start and that on the morrow the picking of the early grapes was going to begin. After many days without any practical work I longed to be using my limbs and offered my services. They looked surprised but accepted my offer and gave me indications as to the site of the vineyard. When I asked at what time I should be there, they said they did not know, but it would be when every sign of dew had been dispelled by the sun, for the grapes must be quite dry, when picked. I knew that but I thought that they could tell me approximately the hour. Later I found that though clocks were to be seen in every home, they were like children in Victorian days - to be seen, but not heard! They were heirlooms, some of them very beautiful indeed and most of them of the 'grandfather' type, but they were not asked to go. No one had a daily train or bus to catch.

The ringing of the angélus sufficed for local needs in the matter of time. This service to the community was performed by a widow of the 1914–18 war and the small payment that she received supplemented her pension. She did not ring it at six o'clock in the morning, noon, and six in the evening. She rang it when she got up in the morning – her rising varied greatly according to the time of the year, she rang it again when she decided to have her déjeuner – and that was seldom far from noon, and she rang it when she came in from the fields at the end of her day. I am sure that no one expected her to be as inhuman and mechanical as a clock that goes and keeps time. And those who wished to be

reminded to turn their hearts towards their Maker three times a day, would not complain. I do not know if the angélus signifies to these people a call to food rather than to prayer or vice versa. They confess that they are not religieux, but that means that they are not concerned much about external observances of religion, though our country parsons would be delighted to see such large congregations. I can only say that a man who was picking grapes in the row next to mine, paused as the angélus sounded and said very quietly 'A Dieu'.

It seems to me that (in general terms) the standard of honesty anywhere is a fairly accurate gauge to real religion, that is, to life, for surely religion and life are or should be one and the same thing. Well, there is an example. One can go into any little café, restaurant, hotel, or auberge anywhere in the district and see a display of dozens of bottles, wines, apéritifs, spirits, liqueurs, cordials, and I know not what. They will be standing on a side-table or a cheffonier or in a cupboard that is not locked. Anyone could help himself to a bottle or a drink without the slightest risk of being caught. I suppose that dishonesty, where it exists, is more likely to show itself in such places and under such circumstances than in any other, so I leave the reader to make his own deductions. Moreover, from my point of view, real religion does not wear a gloomy face, and if anyone feels inclined to 'pity the poor peasant toiling from dawn to dusk' all the year round, I should recommend him to join them in their work, as I have done, and he will find that work and recreation can be one and the same thing - a very pleasant thing indeed. I doubt very much whether anyone has ever known or can ever know what real peace and contentment are, unless he has been engaged in some simple, useful occupation, for man was created with limbs as well as head and heart and needs to use all in order to give full expression to the gifts bestowed upon him. Be all that as it may, the lives of the peasants accord in externals with the practice of Christian principles, and I don't believe that they choose to produce all that they like to eat, drink, and smoke solely for the pleasure of satisfying their natural appetites. Some may, others certainly don't. Good, bad, and indifferent are to be found in all communities, I suppose, but where honesty is general and money is not the basis of life, clearly there is something worthy of serious observation

4. The Vintage

WHEN I woke up in the morning a thick mist blotted out the river and adjoining fields, as it does daily for weeks in late summer and autumn. But overhead was clear sky and the hills were bright with sunshine, while the shadows in the valleys that ran up into those hills were nearly as blue as the sky itself. Soon the mist lifted and revealed dew-spangled grasses and jewelled spider-webs. A pure note rang out from the poplars by the river. The golden oriole - oh, what a lovely bird - was greeting the day. A green woodpecker laughed from some oak trees, a woodlark rose into the sky, was lost to sight and became just a faint, dear song. Soon it was not merely warm but hot. I stripped to my shirt and strolled across the old wooden bridge to the vineyards on the hill-side near by. I had been told to ask for that of Martial Foussac. I had no need to ask. A team of oxen in their long, narrow two-wheeled cart, loaded with casks and a company of people, including one of the peasants that I met overnight, was with the oxen, each carrying a basket. A big family. or so I thought till I joined them. There were three old men, four women of middle age, two young men and three girls, and half a dozen children of various ages from about six years and upwards. Monsieur Foussac came, wished me good morning with. 'You are the "mussur" who wishes to see "les vendanges"?' I have not come to look at the vintage,' I replied. 'I want to help, but it appears to me that you are not short of it.' 'Oh, but we are,' he said. 'The war has taken some of our young men and we who are left are not en ugh. You will see that some terrains on the hills are en friche (uncultivated). The oxen cannot plough there, because they are too steep. It is sad, for the best grapes grow on the hills. But "mussur" will find the work tiring."

'I shall be surprised if I do,' I replied. 'It will not be the first time that I have picked grapes. I have been régisseur of an estate farther north; I have been on the land all my life,

as have my forebears, and my family came originally from Provence.'

The oxen went on, the rest of the company stopped in their tracks, and stared at me with surprise and incredulity. When I assured them that I was not joking (as they do frequently with most serious faces) they came up to me one by one and shook me by the hand warmly. I was accepted into that fraternal and universal human community that has a common love and a common language, the love of the soil, the language of our mother earth, a language that varies according to climate and rainfall but has the same basic principles.

To an eye unused to this district, there appeared to be one vineyard of irregular shape covering several acres. In point of fact, it was a number of vineyards belonging to various peasants, divided by no visible line, for every square foot of it was cultivated. At the local marrie of every parish, there is a plan of every parcel of land, to which reference can be made, and at the four corners of each parcel is (or has been at some time or other) an oblong stone put in vertically to mark the boundaries. Sometimes it is just visible, sometimes it can be found by a little excavation, and sometimes it has disappeared. The peasants know, of course, where their own vines begin and finish. The differing ages of the vines, the differing varieties become evident on careful observation, though they may appear as similar as fields of wheat to a townsman.

The habits of vines enable them to be grown in countless ways. A root can be planted at the base of a house or building, and it can be trained at will to cover as much as one likes. In the open fields they are grown in rows, as espaliers, or, as most of these peasants prefer, on stocks set about a yard apart. Each stock has a stake of chestnut to which are tied the vines as they grow long enough to be tied up. This is a job that is best done by two people, one holding the vines, the other tying them. When they have made their full growth, the ends are cut back to compress the sap and help the grapes to grow to full size. Grapes are produced

only on the first foot or two of each vine, and so it means stooping to gather them. The grapes need a certain amount of shade, which is afforded by the leaves. When a stake breaks and the vine falls over on the ground, some bunches get spoilt. The summer sun is too strong for them and they become shrivelled and useless. When one is gathering, these must be discarded or the quality of the wine will not be so good. After leaf-fall the vines are all cut down to the pied, the old stool, which looks like a gnarled dead-looking root sticking up into the air, increasing a little each year until it becomes a foot to two feet high in fifty years. It is curious that it is the grapes from old vines that produce the best wine. Possibly the roots of young vines do not tap all the mineral resources of the soil. It is interesting to note that, just as dessert apples do not make the best cider, dessert grapes do not make the best wine, and just as our carly apples do not have as good a flavour as the main crop, so the early grapes only make petit vin, that is, wine with a low degree of natural alcohol and with not much flavour either.

Vineyards recall me always to the hop gardens of my native Kent. The beauty of both is restricted owing to the formal culture that practical work makes necessary. True, when hops are trained up strings, it is a joy to walk down the alleys and see the great bunches, so much like those of grapes in a vinery, hanging in their thousands. And when grapes are grown as espaliers, these too can be a delight. But think of a hop, growing in a hedge, that has climbed to the topmost branch or a vine that has crept over an olive in the Midi, and one can see then their full glory, living chandeliers of gold or purple.

Vines and hops agree in their greed for organic manures of all kinds. They can never get too much. But whereas hops are happy in clay, vines must have a well-drained soil with plenty of lime in it. Those who are thinking of producing their own wine in England should bear this in mind.

Vines provide a joy to the eye twice a year. Spring is always a symbol of resurrection but is there ever a greater miracle than when from the seemingly dead and drab stools there shoot forth tender stems with leaves as golden as the sun and as translucent as amber with their tendrils feeling upwards towards the source of warmth that wakes them to new life, as a child lifts its hands to its mother or the earnest suppliant to his Creator? Or is there ever a greater festival of colour than when the chill air of October nights has drifted across the vineyards, turning leaves from green to crear and gold, to pink and purple and even to the brightest scarlet, that only a vivid dawn can match?

On reaching the vineyard, which was on the lowest slope of the hill-side, Foussac halted his oxen at the bottom, so that all the produce would be carried downhill, and proceeded to unload while we took baskets and set to work cutting the grapes with secateurs or sharp knives, for the bunches do not break off readily, unless they are very ripe. The fully able-bodied of us, so to speak, each took a row. The old men and children shared a row between two, while the smallest sampled the grapes and found them good enough to cat! When anyone had a basket full - and that does not take long - he called for another. This was the little ones' duty to supply, while Foussac came, carried the glowing contents of the full baskets down to the bottom and emptied them into the barrels that he had brought in the cart. There was so much chatter and laughter all the time that one had to shout for an empty basket in order to be heard. The work was not done in a hurry nor on the contrary was time wasted. From time to time backs might be straightened for a few minutes, but a certain steady rhythm, as it were, was maintained. On reaching the top of a row, one does not turn round and work downwards, for the ground (and hence the grapes) are nearer to hand it one is working uphill. The descent is silent and slow, for that is the time to eat a bunch of grapes or a pear or a handful of figs, whichever one fancies. Here, I must say, I saw the first evidence of a shortage of workers. Figs remained on the trees till they fell, because the most important crops had to be harvested first and figs were not considered one of these.

Though we began late in the morning owing to the dew,

THE CENEROUS EARTH

barrels were all full just before the angélus sounded at meon. I have called these barrels. Perhaps tubs would describe them better, for they have no tops, either fixed or loose. Locally they are known as comportes and are made of coopered oak. They are round but not cylindrical, being considerably larger at the top than at the base. They have a unique feature. They have handles at each side, so that they can be carried (or emptied), when full, by two people. They hold about 150 lb. of grapes each, and the comporte itself is solid and heavy. The handles in the older ones are part and parcel of the slat in the barrel to which they are attached, so that a man can get the whole of his hand round it without having it squeezed against the side of the barrel. The cooper selected oak with a natural branch (and all the strength that that implies) and shaped it to the desired length and thickness to fit the hand. Some of the new comportes have handles screwed on, but what a poor job it looks, and is, compared with the craftsman's art.

The ox-carts take six of these comportes, but they have to be roped on, for the carts have sides but no fixed front or back. They are beautifully balanced and perfectly designed for the conditions in which they have to be used, such as narrow'streets and rough mountain tracks. They are provided with a ratchet and roller at the back so that loads of hay, straw, etc., can be roped on tightly – a very necessary precaution – and are provided with a brake that operates with a turn-handle on the wheel so that as much or as little brake can be put on at will – also a necessary precaution for the steep descents. These carts are made, of course, by local wheelwrights, for they know what is needed and they alone can make them. How fortunate are these peasants compared with us, who have to use standardized implements that function properly only on dry and level ground.

While the cart was being loaded, we filled our baskets with pears and figs, while I chose a large bunch of very ripe grapes. The peasants do not think much of these early grapes, to which they give the name 'Nouar'. I do not know if it is only a local name or how it is spelt. They are what is

called a white grape but when mature they are light gold. In making wine of them they generally mix some black grapes, for otherwise they say that it would be too 'heady'. If that is so to them, it must indeed have a 'kick' in it, for at festivals one sees them drink in an evening four or five bottles each of the red vin du pays (and that has more body in it than any Bordeaux wine) without any sign of it being more than is good for them. They may become a little more lively than usual, but that is all. Here may I mention that table wines, that is to say, wines that are made of the termented juice of grapes with nothing added or subtracted perfectly natural wine as the peasants call it - seem quite innocuous. If one has drunk a lot of it overnight and the heart has been pladdened, one wakes in the morning still in a merry mood. There is no 'hangover'. I can recommend it to all teetotallers! It would make them human! Nor are these grapes considered worth eating Only the children and I cnjoyed them. I was told that there were other and better kinds to come. I can only say that I found them delicious and did not find anything better and have indeed never tasted anything, not even Muscats, that are more to my liking.

Foussac shouldered the long wand, still called an aiguillon or goad but not used as such, said 'Ah' to his team and set out for home, the team and workers following. I joined Foussac, because his French was the most intelligible to me, and when we reached the bridge, I bid him 'Au revoir' and turned to cross it.

'But, monsieur,' he said, 'you will take déjeuner with us?' 'No thank you,' I replied, 'they will be expecting me to lunch.'

'Don't they know that you have been working with us this morning?'

'Yes, I told them.'

'Then they will certainly not expect you, for our custom is to share what we have with those who help us. It will be simple fare today, for my mother is alone to prepare it and she is now over eighty. You will be welcome, and we should feel ungrateful to you, if you do not join us.'

'That being so, I shall accept most willingly,' I replied, and I meant it. I have always felt more in sympathy with the tillers of the soil than with people who are considered 'cultured' but who often disregard or disbelieve the fundamental principles of life, spiritual or natural.

The Foussacs' homestead, like nearly every house in the district, was designed and built for use and consequently it was beautiful. Architects had not been invented when it was born. Men knew what they needed, built or made what they wanted, their only guide being the common sense and powers of observation or, if you will, 'the light that is given to every man that is born into the world'. I find it difficult to put a date to these houses. We have little with which to compare them. They are certainly of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries and in excellent repair for the most part, for the materials and workmanship are superb. I have seen no two alike in villages or countryside, but the farmhouses have certain features in common. They are built of dressed limestone with very thick walls. They have a flight of stone steps leading up to the front door, for there is a cellar, which is really the ground floor, under the whole house. They have porches, sometimes roofed, small windows (quite unlike French windows of all later periods) and very few. People who spend their lives out of doors do not want and do not like large windows. They like to be snug when they are indoors. (How I wish our local authorities would realize this, when houses are being designed for the use of agricultural workers!) They have old tiles, so old that time has mottled each one with grey, russet and browns. Their general colour seems to vary according to the degree of light. A feature - and a most charming feature - is a sort of tower, that is generally square, attached to one corner of the house. Sometimes the tower begins at the ground and is large enough to contain a room. Sometimes it springs out from about half-way up the building. Occasionally these towers are round, and in large farmhouses there may be two of them, one at each end. I know of one or two that have a square tower at one end, a round one at the other. Whether the towers are round or square, large or small, they all contain a pigeonnier at the top. Their attachment to the house is for a most practical reason indeed. There is a door to the dovecot from the room-inside, and when the pigeons have gone to roost for the night one can put one's hand in and just select a nice plump bird. There is a great variety in the design of these pigeonniers. They would deserve an illustrated monograph devoted to them, for only in this one small region are they to be found. Watermills generally have them as well as farms, and occasionally houses in the villages too They add a distinct value as well as great beauty to the property.

In these lovely old houses the whole of the timber used is oak, adzed to shape. In fact it is like the structure of our oldest buildings in England, but whereas we have only remains of such buildings, here there are whole villages of them, intact – a joy and a wonder. The wars left their mark on churches and eastles rather than on dwellings, it seems.

The rooms in the farmhouse are few and large. Privacy at night was not (and is not) considered any more necessary than by day. It is not thought indecent to expose any part of the human body. It is considered ridiculous, if not indecent, to be secretive about any of its natural functions. These are God-given, are they not? It is the spirit in which they are regarded that counts. The unclothed native woman considers it immodest to wear clothes. Is she wrong?

In addition to porches, the farmhouses often have verandas (extending from these) with oak pilasters and rails and roofs over them, making an excellent place for drying clothes, right at hand. Some of the larger farms have a second story with bedrooms, but most have all their accommodation on the one floor. All have, however, a grenier or attic which extends the whole length of the house. These have miniature windows or air vents and like the other rooms, have wide, adzed, oak floor-boards. They are splendid places for keeping or drying anything and would make wonderful studios. They can and do serve as sleeping accommodation when required as such.

The cave (that is where the wine is kept) is generally immediately under the living-room, so that access to it (frequently required) is convenient. In this are numerous barrels, vats, comportes, press, and I know not what. Other parts contain implements, pigs, sheep, and cattle, if there is no separate buildings for cows and oxen, for rarely is there any permanent pasture near the houses and all stock are stalled except when someone has time to tend them by the roadside, or on the pastures near the river, or on the steep hill-sides that are not under vines. I should think that we could keep at least a million more cattle in Britain on the grass of our roadsides, if the same custom prevailed here. Such waste – and that is only one of many neglects – would horrify these peasants, if they saw it.

I confess that I envy these peasants their homes. They commend themselves to me in every way. I like particularly the plan of having all the living-room upstairs. It is good to be high and dry, when one is indoors. It is nice to walk out of one's front door and be able to survey one's little domain, and it is also nice (especially for the housewife) to be able to leave the soil from one's boots at the bottom of the steps. Furthermore where geese, turkeys, ducks, and chickens are allowed to roam (and quite rightly) to pick up any odd grains and other edible things that are to be found round any farm and its buildings, these have a habit of not merely approaching an open door but of entering, when anyone's back is turned. It is easy to prevent this, when they climb stairs. They don't like being hustled down these and soon learn their place.

Nothing seems to make so much mess as poultry, when the ground is wet. It is a pity, for they are excellent scavengers and when at liberty they will nearly live on trifles despised by bigger stock. But how they can abuse that liberty! I shall never forget a scene that I witnessed in the far west of Ireland. I had been asked to go to a small farm that looked out over the Atlantic and Valencia Island. This too is a peasants' land, productive too, but how different are those farms! There was a small quadrangle formed by a wall at

the entrance with a gateway (but no gate, of course) in it, on the right were cowpens, on the left stable, etc., in front was the house. In the centre of the little quadrangle was a heap of dung, which was the centre of interest for pigs, ducks, geese, and chickens - all of which had access to house as well as the other buildings. All the buildings and the house were low; all the doors level with the ground outside, all the floors (house included) were of earth. How could poultry be expected to recognize any difference and respect the house? Of course they did not and when I went in, I found the housewife busy 'knocking up' a large dough of maize flour on a small central table. As she did so, two lusty cocks kept jumping up on the table and getting a good beakful before they were swept off by the clbows of the good wife. They did not mind at all being knocked down and were up again in a matter of seconds. 'Knocking up' (as the bakers call it) and knocking down (as the cocks got it) made breath-taking exercise for the woman and breathtaking amusement for mel I can never forget the sight. It was nearly as funny as the show provided by a couple of goat's kids playing 'King of the Castle' on a barrel.

5. Busy Days

On reaching Foussac's farm, the comportes, loaded with grapes, were dumped on the ground. No care has to be taken in this respect with grapes for wine, for the juice has to be extracted from them by pressure of some sort or other. But care is taken in another way. Six clean white pieces of muslin had been brought to the vineyard and according as a comporte was filled, it was carefully tied with muslin to keep away flies, wasps, and hornets. The delicious scent of grapes is pleasing to these, as well as to humans, and as the comportes get filled, so do the insects collect - but not in swarms, as I have seen them in other places. For the most part no attention was paid to them. Occasionally a too attentive wasp would pay the penalty, but the hornet or two that was generally present was never disturbed. It was agreed that he was perfectly harmless, if let alone, but would retaliate mercilessly, if attacked - and his sting was quite serious. I watched one or two going into half-tilled comportes. They seemed to spend most of their time killing any flies that came within their reach, and I never saw them pay the slightest attention to people.

The oxen were unyoked in a second. They have no harness and one only has to lift the iron pin that goes through the yoke between their heads and through a hole in the long pole, by which a cart or any implement is drawn. Nothing could be simpler, more practical or more economical.

We mounted the stone steps, carrying our baskets, which we had filled with apples, pears, figs, melons, and a few late peaches, collected from odd trees dotted about in or near the edge of the vineyard. When we entered, I was taken back suddenly to my childhood and just such a farmhouse kitchen. There was the long, familiar refectory table with the rails on the bottom which enabled me to get, with some difficulty, on to my chair. There were the plates put out on the polished table, with one knife and tork and spoon for

each. There was the inglenook with a log fire and the same cauldron, with the same shape and the same kind of rackhook coming down the chimney, holding the cauldron just where it was wanted. There were the old rush-seated chairs, the grandfather clock, the brass candlesticks on the mantelshelf above the fire and the dark seats on each side of the fire, wide enough for two children or two lovers. There were the oak beams, some uneven in shape, in the ceiling above me. There were the same cupboards on each side of the fire, containing all the jars and tins of the housewife, and opposite the door the great sideboard holding plates, cups and saucers, dishes and so on. There was, too, only one picture; a large coloured print of Queen Victoria, when she was young? No. I. was not Queen Victoria, but the Madonna and Child. I noticed too, as my eyes got accustomed to the light, after coming in from the brilliant sunshine, that the grandfather clock, though of oak, was slightly taller and narrower than it should be and that the panels in the sideboard had rounded instead of square corners, but it had in it the same dinner plates or they looked the same, as far as I could see! It was quite a strange experience, made stronger when I scanned the company who all looked English, It seemed quite natural to hear a little girl addressed as Betty and the dog as Dick, but why on earth were they speaking an unintelligible language?

All morning I wondered of what the family consisted, I knew that the old lady left at home was Foussac's mother for he had said so, and I had guessed correctly which was his wife. Of the young people one was their son and one their daughter-in-law, widow of their eldest son, who had been killed in the war. Betty was her four-year-old child. At déjeuner for my sake they all spoke French, their French. I thought sometimes that it was easier for me than for a Frenchman to understand them, for as often as not they pronounced a final 's' or 't', when it should be mute, and (more strange still) they pronounced the vowel 'a' as we do, instead of 'ah'. Further, 'bien' became 'bee-ang' and 'pain' became 'pang' with plenty of 'g' and an English 'a' in each case . . .

and so on. It was really most extraordinary and most amusing, for they were satisfied that they were speaking good French. It was the northerner who was talking patois. This was the first sign that I had of their distaste for the northerner. I was to see very many more in years to come.

I suppose that we can find a somewhat similar comparison. The Yorkshireman is, I take it, speaking English. We, southrons, are talking in dialect to him. What indeed is pure French or pure English? Many a word or expression that (in the past) was accepted as 'good' has passed out of use or has come to be considered as vulgar, ain't it? And anyway, who is going to decide what is poor English? 'I bee-unt a-gween ter -' as we say in my native rongue! So let us leave it there and have lunch with the Foussacs.

The fruit that we brought was put on great dishes to keep company with half a dozen bottles of red wine, already there, and Madame Foussac proceeded to ladle soup out of a huge tureen. In it were, as usual, large pieces of bread, pumpkin, onions, some white haricots, herbs and some garlic and I cannot say what else. We all knew what to do with it! This, together with quantities of bread and wine would be the main dish in many a French peasant home, but not in the Dordogne valley. On to the table came a large home-cured ham and with it potatoes baked in their jackets, followed by salad of chicory and sliced onion with a dressing of walnut oil and red wine vinegar. Finally, there arrived a number of small, round, flat cheeses, made of goats' milk and known locally as cabicou (I have no idea how it is spelt!) and of course the fruit. Everything was, of course, the produce of the holding - plain, fresh, good. What more can one desire? What indeed can compare? The rich who live in towns can buy the very best of everything, or so it is said. But can they? Certainly not. They can buy nothing fresh, really fresh. That is a privilege that only the grower has. Perhaps only those who have grown produce know what a difference it makes, especially with such a thing as asparagus. How can a townsman know how delicious this can be, for one has to

cut it and dash off to the kitchen and plunge it into boiling water as soon as possible, after washing it of course.

Though there is nowadays a baker in most of the villages, the greater part of the peasants are still making their own bread, in the old-fashioned brick ovens. These are exactly the same as in our old farmhouses, when they are inside. Often, however, the oven stands outside in the form of a small building all to itself with its roof projecting a little, so that the baker is protected from sun or rain. It is not uncommon to find a communal oven, placed in such a position that it can be used conveniently by several families, who have their own baking days or arrange them to suit one another. This is a distinct advantage, for an oven that is used frequently takes less fuel and time to heat it than one which is used only one a week. The wooden peels, used for putting the loaves in or taking them out, are much bigger than ours. They need to be, for the loaves that they make weigh about 12 lb. each. They are round, about two feet in diameter, and anything up to six inches high. I have never seen them cut in any other way than this. The loaf is put on edge against the chest, whether this is clothed or bare (as it often is in summer) and held out straight in front with one hand, while the bread is cut with the knife drawn towards the body with the other. A slice is not made right across the loaf, for such a slice would be too large for even the best appetite. Pieces are cut off, first from one side and then from the other, by turning the loaf round. The bread is made from their own wheat and is ground at one or other of the local water-mills, many of which are still in operation.

Till recently all of these were used also for generating electricity, but barrages across the main river Dordogne now generate it in bulk. There is, however, at Saint-Céré a form of generator that is not familiar to me and which I should like to commend. One sees what appears to be an ordinary weir, but instead of the water running to waste over it, it runs over an invisible wheel or barrel (I do not know what to call it), turning it continuously. The barrel stretches from one side of the river to the other and must be generating a

great deal in the course of twenty-four hours. There is hardly any fall, certainly not three feet, and I cannot see the need for any. The little generating station is of concrete and built underground, with steps leading down to it. The whole thing is extremely simple and cannot be expensive to construct. As it would disfigure no landscape, it would be possible to have a series of these along any river and, for that matter, any stream in the countryside. At present the greater part of our farms are without electricity because of the expense of taking it to them. This would solve the problem for most of Britain, which has an ample rainfall, and it would help to conserve and use much that is now going to waste. I dare say that some electrical sage will tell me that he knows all about this method. I can only say that I know nowhere in Britain where it has been installed, and I plead for its general use in rural areas at least.

During lunch we all drank a chabrol in the usual way from soup plates that makes this quite easy, and I noticed that the child's mother poured wine into her soup too, though she was only four years old. This may perhaps surprise people who do not know the French. For them light table wines are not merely good but necessary, being regarded as both food and drink, as they are undoubtedly. I wonder often if they consider them as an alcoholic drink, for they make a clear distinction between them and alcohol, the former being regarded as natural, while the latter is obtained by the process of distillation. Be that as it may, the fact is that babies are not kept on milk, after they are weaned, but on its products, butter and cheese, and wine diluted with water till after a few years they drink pure wine. There is a very marked difference between the nations that drink wine habitually and those that do not. The former have a far greater vitality shown in their speed of thought and action, their whole tempo of life is quicker and noisier. being more boisterous. They certainly know how to enjoy themselves more. They do not just exist, and they know what the purpose of life is - which is more than most of us do.

After lunch, Foussac thanked me and said that they would need no help in the afternoon, as the family could manage alone, for there would be only two or at most three comportes to fill. He gave me all the fruit that I could carry and told me to help myself to any that I wanted at any time. I explained to him that I was a glutton for fruit and that, if I took him at his word, my morning's help would prove very expensive. He laughed and said that, if I are all day, no one would notice where I had been! And I do not suppose that they would. I did count one day how many large bunches of grapes I could eat, when working all day in hot sunshine and replacing sweat with grapes I managed fourteen, weighing (I should say) an average of a pound per bunch. I tried with figs too one day and cried halt when I had finished my fifty-seventh! As in most things, one has to train to eat fruit instead of drinking and I don't recommend anyone to try to heat my score on his first day at the vintage. He may find it inconvenient! By the way, the peasants told me that grapes, if eaten while the dew is still on them, are the finest natural aperient. I don't understand why the dew should make them more efficacious, but as they say so, I am sure it 15.

On the next morning when the mist had risen and I adjudged that it would be dry chough for grape-picking, I crossed the old wooden bridge and saw an ox-cart and people going in the direction of the vineyard of yesterday. When I caught up with it I found (to my surprise) the same company – and a load of comportes on the cart.

'I thought that you had finished the early grapes,' I said. 'Yes,' they replied, 'we did and put them all through the moulin too before it was dark.'

"Through the mill?' I asked. 'Surely you do not grind them?'

'Well, not exactly,' they said. 'You should come and see, if it interests you. It is quite a simple machine.'

'I certainly will,' I replied. 'But what are you going to do now? Pick some figs or pears or apples?'

'Oh, no. We are going to pick a neighbour's early grapes

now,' was the reply. Then I saw that walking in front of the ox-team was not Foussac but another peasant, Daniel Chapousse with his team. I offered my services and again received a generous invitation to eat as much as I liked, which I did without fear of depriving anyone. When we began to cut, Chapousse came to me and explained that those early grapes fell off very easily, almost at a touch - that was one of their drawbacks - and that it was necessary to put one hand under each bunch, as one cut it, so as to catch any grapes that fell. Of course some would fall, but the children would pick them up. That was their little job. The company set his mind at rest by telling him that I had been with them yesterday, knew what to do and was a cultivateur, like themselves. That information unlocked the door to his heart. He shook me warmly by the hand and we set to work. I suppose that there are people who would regard this as a form of drudgery, for any occupation can be such to those who do not put their heart into it. For my part, having nothing to do or being able to do nothing is the most serious form of punishment.

Of one thing I am positively certain. Call it what you will, work or not, all these people were enjoying themselves thoroughly. As they always talked their patois among themselves - a language that remains unintelligible to me even now - I have no idea what they were chatting about, but their tongues were seldom more idle than their hands, and their conversation was often broken by peals of laughter. This was not something extraordinary. It was just normal for them. It went on, as I found later, throughout the year, whether we were picking greengages, gathering grapes, digging potatoes, cutting and carting pumpkins, picking maize, cutting tobacco or even ploughing. They believed indeed the old adage that 'Many hands make light work'. I should like to add that in their case anyway, 'Many lips make light laughter', and that it is infectious. Even when one does not understand the words, one feels the spirit.

After all, is there anything strange about this? Have we not all noticed that a little child, as soon as it can use its

hands and feet, shows a strong desire to help mother in what she is doing and is quite content if allowed to do so? Of course it is not a help at first – quite otherwise in fact, and many a mother has spoilt her child through not allowing it to fulfil this desire. But when this is fostered, the delight of service grows and the seeds of a life of happiness are sown. Was it Ignatius Loyola – or who? – that said, 'Give'me a child till he is seven and he is mine for ever'. It is a wise saying, that we should all do well to ponder carefully.

The grapes on this occasion were rather easier to pick. Few stakes had got broken and few vines were lying in a tangled mass. In consequence our six comportes were full before the angelis sounded in spite of an interval for refreshment. A patch of melons was on the southern edge of the vineyard and we were all invited to goûter. In polite circles, this would mean to 'taste'. With these peasants, it meant 'Eat as much a you like'. And they did, while I kept to grapes, not wanting to mix my drinks and not caring much for melons, even though they were lovely, ripe, redfleshed ones. Their perfume and appearance inside, when cut, are more pleasing to my nose than to my stomach except the citrouille or melon d'Espagne, which makes a marvellous and aromatic preserve and becomes known to us, when candied, as citron peel. I suppose that citron is a corruption of cutroualle, for it has nothing to do with the citrous fruits.

There remained only a few pieds of grapes ungathered and these were not more than we could carry in our baskets. The Chapousses' home was not so far as the Foussacs' and we arrived just before the angelus rang – rather to the surprise of the housewife. Chapousse explained that owing to an extra helper all the grapes had been cut. I declined this compliment and passed it back, saying that the vines had been so well tied and the stakes so good that the grapes had been very easy to gather – and that was the fact of it. There was the same invitation to lunch, the same willing acceptance on my part, a similar kitchen and meal but with the

addition of a large bowl of walnuts, the first of which had just begun to fall. I was now able to sort out the Chapousse family, but there were others still to account for. These proved to be more neighbours, Moïse Eyrolles and family. It is interesting to notice that these Biblical names persist here, as they used to do in Britain, decreasing as the Book from which they are taken goes out of favour. I discovered too that lunch was no déjeuner, as in the north, but goûter, and that elevenses became merenda instead of casse-croûte. But what interested me most was to see how these families who were not related cooperated not only in grape-gathering but in many ways. I wondered, for example, what adjustments were made to meet the fact that none of the vineyards or other plots of produce were of the same size and that therefore some were getting more help than others. Was there some payment in money or in kind to balance this? Extreme surprise was expressed, when I put this question in the most tactful way that I could frame. The naïve reply was: 'We all need to get our grapes picked and so we are all in the same state, and so we all help' - or simple words to that effect. Farther down the river, where the fields are larger, I have seen as many as fourteen ox-teams at work in a four-acre field, and anyone would suspect that it was a ploughing competition. It was nothing of the sort. It was the ox-teams of the parish ploughing someone's field. Their practice was to plough all the fields that had to be ploughed, one after the other till all were done, without regard to their size or ownership. Of course all these teams could not keep at work, except at the beginning. They had to stop frequently on the headlands to avoid getting in one another's way, but what did that matter? No one had a train to catch or a labour bill to pay, and why should not ploughing be a social event? Would it be as pleasant it each were working his own team alone in his own field?

6. Interlude

NEXT morning, instead of waiting indoors for the mist to rise, I decided to go out in it and just look at things. On the way to the old wooden bridge there was an avenue of walnut trees at irregular intervals, fine mature trees loaded with nuts. Here, near the river, they got enough moisture for mosses, deep olive-green, looking almost black at a distance, to develop into great patches on the solid silver boles and undersides of the larger branches, while higher up all the limbs were decorated with gold and silver. What a lovely combination' walnuts, last of the trees to clothe themselves in spring, are the first to feel the chill air of autumn nights. Their leaves were turning to brown and some had already fallen and lay on the ground. Now and again a nut, made heavy with moisture, broke from its twig and fell on to the ground, making (in the still air) a thud as if a large stone had been thrown by some unseen hand. And then all was silence, complete silence, such as one feels in great snowfields. There were informal pastures on each side of the road. The lush grass was completely covered with cradles of gossamer that held a heavier dew than I have ever seen. When I stooped down and looked across it, it had the appearance of a lake of ice, frozen when its waters were whipped by wind. I understood then why the peasants spoke of a 'white frost' in the valley, when there had been no frost and when they knew quite well that there had been none or the leaves of melons and pumpkins would have registered it infallibly. I understood too why we were going to be haymaking in the beginning of October. These wonderful dews at night followed by equally wonderful sunny days combined to make grass behave as if it were spring.

At the bridge I took the path that followed the riverside. This is one of the many joys of rural life in France. One can walk along either bank of every river. There are seldom any hedges, marking boundaries of ownership, and not many

obstructions of any kind. And those who enjoy fishing, which needs more patience than I have, can get permission from the local mairie, a fishing licence in fact, to follow his sport locally or, if he prefers it, he can obtain a permit to fish in all the main rivers of France - and that for a few shillings. Furthermore, there are plenty of fish always asking to be caught! The amount of water to be fished is such that the population simply cannot over-fish it and create a scarcity or a remnant so cunning that they are difficult to catch - except possibly in the vicinity of the few large towns.

My feet left a green trail through the white dew to a poplar, where I stopped again and listened but could hear nothing, not even the river as it ran between boulders only about a hundred yards away. Beside me a bush hung over the black water and, as I stood, a kingfisher came and settled on a branch of it. It made not a sound and seemed quite unreal in an unreal world of silence. But suddenly out of the mist came the heavy flap of wings, so heavy that I thought it must be a swan. It scared the kingfisher which flew away with a shrick. It passed just above my head. It was only a loriot, the oriole, a black bird with a golden waistcoat, but its wings were so heavy with dew that it was finding it difficult to fly, as any bird does when it has fallen into water which is not its natural element.

The poplar, beside which I stood, generally called 'Dutch' by the French, is one of the most pleasing features of this valley. There are far more of these than the Lombardy. I find it a much more beautiful tree. In its younger stages it has a perfectly straight single stem with very thin branches which grow upwards, like the Lombardy, but far fewer of them. They give the tree a lighter appearance, for the bole is not hidden by them. The bark is almost, if not quite, as white as that of the silver birch, but pearly rather than polished. It grows extremely quickly. In 20 to 25 years it has reached its prime with a circumference of 7 or 8 feet, and a height of over 100 feet. The small side branches are cut off as long as it is convenient to do this with the aid of 'ladder and saw. In consequence the head that does form

eventually is very high up, for the stem of a tree continues to grow till it has reached its prime. As timber it is good white hard wood, having a multiplicity of uses, and as it has not been allowed to grow side branches, the timber merchant finds it clean, i.e. free of knots. Visitors to France will have noticed how attractive are those long avenues of branchless trees, having boles of every kind of curve. Yet they are so treated for two reasons: (i) so that they make good timber, as mentioned, and (ii) so that the side branches do not shade the crops, which grow right up to them. And the trimmings are not wasted. They are collected for use as kindling wood, when dry, or for heating the bread ovens, as we used to do too, when we knew the meaning of the word thrift.

The poplars were planted at odd places along the bank with occasional little rows of them in the pastures, if someone so fancied. I say 'someone', because the pasture, which in England would be! ong to one owner, has a number, though there is no visible division between them. When it is time to cut the hay, however, one might find four or five or more ox-teams, each mowing (with a grass-cutter like ours) its owner's plot. One sometimes sees a plot no larger than a football pitch standing forlorn in the middle, when all the rest has been cut and carted. Its owner has got behind with his work somehow or other.

Whenever I looked at these pastures, and at the lovely silver-stemmed poplars (or the whole landscape, for that matter) I always felt a great sense of harmony everywhere. All was good to look upon. Yet there could have been no planning, as we understand it, and no striving to produce a beautiful effect. Each individual did what he instinctively felt to be right and lo! a living picture was painted as naturally as the birth of a child or a day. It was not difficult to imagine what a commercial farmer or forester would do with it. It would be all ploughed or all pasture with no trees left to be a nuisance – or it would be all poplars, because one of those methods would be cheapest in 'man hours' and give more profit in terms of money. Yet I feel quite sure that

over a period of (say) fifty years the peasants would be found to have taken the greatest amount of produce without any decrease whatsoever in fertility. Their methods of husbandry are not out of date, because they follow principles that are valid for all time. They do not need to make countless experiments, as we have to do, for many generations have found out by common sense and careful observations many things, of which we are still very ignorant. No one person can find out very much about the land in a lifetime, however long it may be. When we have had an unbroken tradition like the Chinese, for 4,000 years, we shall be able to appreciate how little we know at present.

There is a vast difference between making a living on the land and making money out of it. These peasants are doing the former and have the best and most varied diet imaginable. We, Anglo-Saxons, have left a disgraceful trail of deserts and dumps all over the world. We have felled the great virgin forests without replanting, we have used up the virgin soils without returning the wastes to them, we have extracted the minerals from the earth beneath and the nitrogen from the air above, we have polluted the rivers and over-fished the sea. We have been the Prodigal Son of the human race and (shame on us!) we have not repented. We are getting to the end of the earth's resources and are face to face with a permanent shortage of food in the world. And then? 'The wheels of God grind slowly but they grind exceedingly small' and 'As we have sown, so shall we reap.' We shall harvest great suffering. There is perhaps some excuse for our actions, so long as we cannot see that they have done any harm, but we have left havoc, wherever we have taken our 'civilization', and the outrage to the earth has been visible to us for a long time.

Surely our whole attitude to the earth is fundamentally wrong. We do not lay claim to the planets or the Milky Way, though perhaps we should if we had any hope of getting possession, but we behave as if we were entitled to do whatever we choose with any plot of this earth, as though it was our own making (and not the Creator's) and as though

we had no duty to Him or even to our own posterity. But we shall learn, for we must if we are not to die of famine. We could save ourselves a great deal of trouble, if we could discard some pride and learn the lessons that the earth has taught these and other peasants whom we now despise, because they have not been seduced by our 'progress', 'progress', to destruction.

Such thoughts were passing through my head, as I strolled along the riverside beside the tall spires of the poplars. The lower leaves were already golden and they would continue from bottom to top, till at last there would be left nothing but a few glad pennants on their mastheads with all below them bare but disclosing the silver of their boles. Now all the haves were green, except the lowest. Though garrulous in the slight st breeze, they hung heavy and still and sad, with tears falling now and again from their tips. As I stopped again, the mist seemed to move, though neither poplar leaves nor I felt any breath of air. Was I getting dazed through looking into this white void? No. It certainly was moving, but not in my direction! It was just getting thinner and certainly lighter. In a tew minutes a shaft of sunlight fell through a rent on to the dew-sprent pasture and before I had reached the bridge on my return, all the mist had disappeared as if it had never been, and a landscape of opaque pearl was suddenly transformed into one of diamonds, such as a fairv's wand can accomplish in one's dreams. It was a miracle, or seemed so, only perhaps because the transformation was so quick. For are we not ever in a world of miracles, which we accept without surprise, or praise, such as dayspring, sleep and life itself. They are to us such common happenings that we take them for granted with little gratitude to the Giver of them.

Recently, after the passage of many years, I walked again in an autumn mist along the same path and watched the same wonderful transformation. I stood again on the bridge, now replaced by a modern but not unsightly suspension bridge, watching the sun gild the rock cliff of the Puy d'Issolud, the *château* of Loubressac, the wooded hill-sides

still in full summer robes, the vineyards glowing with harlequin colours, the squat grey willows on one side of the river and the tall poplars on the other, and an old man came along with a basket on his arm and a stick in his hand. He was tall, upright, bearded and eighty-four years old, as he told me. He was swinging his stick as though in rhythm with a song in his heart. He stopped and bade me good morning. We of the earth do not pass one another by without a few words, and in France one does not begin a conversation by discussing the weather.

'Beautiful, n'est-ce pas? All of it.'

'Indeed it is,' I replied, realizing that he felt what I was enjoying.

'I come here often night and morning,' he continued. 'I think that it must be the loveliest place in the world. Look at it now. All the *richesse* of the earth, heaven-sent. What more could human heart desire.' I smiled my share in his enjoyment. I had no words to match his. We stood together silent but joined by a mutual pleasure. I looked at his basket with a question mark in my eyes.

'I am just going to pick up some walnuts. The first are beginning to fall. Some of them will get crushed by the passing carts.'

'And someone else will collect them, if you don't?' I suggested.

'Oh, no!' he replied, with a little surprise, I thought. 'Someone in passing may taste one or two, and will be welcome to do so, but no one would collect them. We all have one or two trees. Only the first in this avenue is mine, together with some pasture beside it, which I let to a neighbour. Some people have two trees and one has three, according to the size of their piece of pasture. I have two more trees at home.'

This avenue of walnuts is of various ownership, as are the pasture, the vineyards, and the wooded hills. The whole population has contributed to this wealth and beauty. They share the making of it, the harvests of it, the pleasure of looking at it – and, not least, that of shooting over all of it.

There was, he told me, a violent burst of indignation in the time of his grandparents, when 'they' (meaning the Government in Paris) ordained that people should obtain and pay for a shooting licence. The resentment against this and indeed against every edict from 'them' shows no sign of abating. 'They' are certainly regarded as 'foreigners', disliked and despised.

'Why,' he asked me, 'why should we seek "their" permission to shoot over our own woods and still more, au nom du Dieu, why should we pay "them"?'

I found this a poser. I could think of no valid reason in the sight of the One, to whom he had appealed, so I put forward the argument of the politicians. I pointed to the good tarred road, that now replaced the sound but uneven surface of former days.

'To pay for that.'

'Bah!' he ejaculated. 'That was not done for our benefit. The Minister of Trat.spo.t bought a domain in the district so that he could come and cat and drink the good things that he cannot buy in Paris. He has, of course, his automobile and his automobile likes smooth, tarred roads, and so we have them. But they are bad for our oxen and horses. They are too hard for their teet. Every farmer in every land must know that.'

Of course we know it. Of course he was right. Is it not written, albeit invisibly, in every stable that: 'It ain't the 'opping over the 'edges that 'urts the 'orses' 'oofs, it's the 'ammer, 'ammer, 'ammer on the 'ard 'igh road.'

I tried again. What about the schools?

'Yes. What about them indeed? he asked "They" send "their" teachers, people who have been brought up in "their" towns with their heads and hearts stuffed with everything except a love of the land. "They" teach our children "their" language and "their" way of thinking. They cannot do otherwise, of course, but we can see the result. Gradually our children are being seduced (I don't say deliberately, mind you – I give them the credit of believing in all sincerity that they are considering our welfare), seduced, I mean, from

the earth to the towns; and that is from le bon Dieu, n'est-ce pas? Whatever induces people to prefer life in towns to life on the land, is certainly not the love of God, is it? You see how many good stone walls that held the soil of the terraces in place have fallen down and there are no hands to put them up. You see some good old houses fallen to ruins, especially on Les Causses (the plateaux), you see plots on the steep slopes now en friche (uncultivated) where the grapes that made the best wine used to grow. There are two farmers sur la plaine (in the valley) who have lost their sons to the towns and been compelled to use tractors - tractors that maul the ground, tear off the roots of walnuts and fruit trees, give no dung, prove much more expensive than oxen or horses and give no pleasure to anyone. And the more that the children arc taught, the less are they able to think and act for themselves. That is what we get for our money when it goes for schools.'

I felt bound to confess that we had the same experience in England, though I did not tell him that the drift from land to towns had been of far greater extent and longer duration. If roads and schools were of no benefit, then what about money being used for the army? If my former suggestions, were squibs, this was a rocket. He went off anyway.

'The army? The French Army? We did not see that during the war—except stragglers from its defeat up north—nor the Germans either, except when they were cut off in the Midi at the end of the war and some tried to get back through here. But we had our own army We had an ambush behind every rock and tree from Cahors to Brive, and no Boche got back to his country to tell any tale about ours.'

I countered: 'But you had to be provided with arms. You could not make them in your little old furnaces in the hills, for I have not seen any of these working for many years.'

'Bien vrai,' he admitted. 'That is true, but we did not get our arms from the French. No. no. nothing. They fell from the skies, in answer to our prayers, brought by the Allies in aeroplanes, by the English and Americans. Listen! You see Loubressac on the rock up there and beyond that another rock. Have you got good eyes? If so, you will sec, not on the top of the rock but just under it, the Château des Anglais. The English did not build it during this war. They built it many centuries ago together with many other things here. Perhaps they have long memories. Anyway, it was here at Autoire, where their old castle is now in ruins, that it was arranged for arms to be dropped for us. Fifty-two aeroplanes, think of it, fifty-two came on one day, circled round, coming lower and lower, and then let go their parachutes. They fell all day. There were rifles, small guns, ammunition - everything - even money. For what? We wondered. To bribe the Germans, if any of our young men got taken prisoner, so we were told. The Germans could often be bribed to let their prisoners escape. But our young men did not have to use it. It was les Baches who became prisoners or got killed. Of course we lost some of our boys. You have perhaps seen here and there in our countryside tablets to their memory, to the boys who were killed at Le Broch or Le Causse or to the three on the bridge at Saint Cété, where they fell defending it and were thrown into the river by the Germans.' After a pause he continued: 'Our young men still have their arms. Who knows? Our land may be threatened again at some time by someone. We value our independence, we value our freedom. We can order our lives peaceably amongst ourselves. We do not need orders from Paris, gendarmes and demands for taxes! Last year "they" sent an inspector to ask our young men, who were fishing, to produce their licence to fish. They threw him in the river, pulled him out before he was drowned, and advised him to get out of the district. He did so and has not returned. What will you? Can you expect otherwise from boys who needed no permit to kill Germans and are then asked to show one for catching fish? Que diable!

7. The Mysterious Truffle

THERE is a certain atmosphere of mystery about the truffle in France, as there is about the crayfish in England. I know, for example, where one can catch and enjoy dishes of the latter, but I wonder what proportion of the English population succeeds in finding out its habitat? 'Mum's the word' – even where it is to be found.

It is much the same with the truffle. Small black portions of this delicious fungus are to be found in all sorts of tinned pâté in any shop in any town where delicatessen can be bought. Through the years, the prices of these pâtés has increased with the decrease of truffle in them – an all too common tendency in modern commerce.

It is not difficult to find out that the Dordogne département is the home of the truffle and that Périgueux is the habitat in which it is 'at home', so to speak. There one can hunt false trails and get plenty of ambiguous information, humorous or even deliberately misleading, and the truffle in the pâté will be no more plentiful than elsewhere. It is true that, before war drove so many good things out of general view, truffles could be found there on the market stalls in common with all the fruits of the earth brought in by the peasants. But the peasants do not have to bring them to market now. The makers of pâté scour the countryside and buy these luxuries at the source and pay quite a fanciful price, knowing indeed how to make a little go a long way in every sense.

I intend now to lift the veil of mystery. The truffle has disappeared from Britain simply because the conditions necessary for its growth exist no longer. What those conditions are will be explained later, but let me say at once that the truffle, for all its elusiveness, is not rare in France. It is widely distributed through the large old provinces of Quercy and Périgord and (I may add) Périgueux is only on the outer fringe of its habitat

outer fringe of its habitat.

The truffle is parasitic on the roots of oaks. Some people claim that it is a special kind of oak, which they call the garric oak, and in certain areas this appears to be so, but I can state definitely after exploring large parts of these old provinces that the truffle can be found in conjunction with any kind of oak, including even the evergicen oak.

When one sees thriving oaks, it is idle to look for truffles, for they only grow on roots that are not in good health, so to speak.

One sees somewhat similar conditions in our New Forest, where oaks are native and sow themselves. As the light gravelly nature of the soil is not conducive to good growth, they remain stunted - except in cases where the roots have pierced the gravel 'pan' and penetrated into stronger soil below.

Truffles depend in fact on the all health of the oaks. The question whether truffles cause sickness in them or sickness invites truffles, seems to be unanswerable. I should say that they are co-existent Ir fles, or rather the ground in which they grow, need plenty of light and they are not found in woods. Oaks are planted or acorns sown at a distance of forty feet in either direction and they would not be planted at all if something better could be grown, for they cannot be considered a very 'paying' proposition for the wood is worth little and truffles can never be guaranteed to grow, even when acorns have been saved from trees that have harboured truffles regularly. They may begin to appear when a tree is only five or six years old, they may not begin till the tree is twenty years old and they may not come at all No one can explain this. Mystery, as I said at the outset, surrounds the truffle in various ways.

The soil necessary is limestone and very little of it, overlying limestone rock, the trees or acorns being set in fissures between the rocks, if the e is not enough soil for normal planting. This means that the oaks are to be found on poor, thin uplands, and on slopes that would grow only these and vines.

One does not have to dig on the chance of there being

truffles round a tree. Their presence is indicated by the fact that the herbage of poor grass begins to die, when truffles begin to form beneath. One often sees, for example, a ring completely circling a tree at several feet distant from the stem, just as 'fairy rings' form on our pastures. This gradually grows in circumference, as other fungoid rings do, being always at the ends of the roots. But though dying herbage and rings are sure evidence of the presence of truffles, one has to find the exact position of a truffle by some means or other. One could, of course, get the truffle by digging up the whole of the ground that indicated its presence. This would be a waste of time and would destroy to a large extent the crop of future years.

Three methods are used for locating them precisely. There is the time-honoured practice of using swine.* Sows are always used, never males. They are trained to follow their masters, but in fact, when taken out to hunt truffles, they are led by collar and chain. While at work, the owner carries some maize and as soon as the sow shows that she has smelt a truffle, he gives her some maize to cat immediately, while he digs out the truffle, using a baton shod with an iron point with which to lever it out of the ground. Truffles are found at varying depths down to about six inches and are or irregular shape and size, the largest weighing nearly a pound.

It is most amusing to watch a well-trained sow at work. As soon as she has detected a 'quarry', she does not begin to root it out. She turns her head towards her owner as much as to say: 'Here is one. Give me some maize.' As is the case with all training of animals, this has to be done by kindness and edible reward.

It is interesting to record that it is not every pig that can be trained to be a good hunter. When a litter is quite young, all the gilts are offered little pieces of truffle, and the one that shows the greatest avidity for truffle is chosen for training.

Another method is to use dogs. These have no natural *Known locally as cavage.

taste for truffles at all. So small pieces of it are mixed with their food so that they acquire the taste and get to know its scent. Then the training is the same as with a sow, except that the reward is something that the dog likes, generally a morsel of the same kind of meat as that which is mixed with the truffle in the process of training.

I have been told that in some old book or other it has been mentioned that a special breed of dog exists or did exist for truffle hunting. I can find no confirmation of this in these old provinces. No such breed exists today and the 'oldest inhabitant' has neither seen nor heard of such a breed. All local dogs are mongrel and are trained for various purposes. Purity of breed may please, does please, the aesthetic eye but intelligence is not augmented thereby and is often decreased. It is very difficult indeed to prevent a dog from scratching (and thereby damaging a truffle) immediately it has found one. Hence sows are preferred.

The third method is a most ingenious one. The peasants, whose powers of careful observation are so well developed, have noticed that on still winter days columns of gnats hover just above the ground where there is a truffle, enjoying the aroma from it. They can, therefore, go and dig it up without the use of cither sow or dog. But they do not do that. Instead, they put a piquet in the ground to mark the spot and move on The reason for this is that when the column of gnats is disturbed, it will re-form a little way off, where there is no truffle at all, and return to its truffle when the disturber has gone away. When a peas int has made his round and has put in all his marking sticks, he returns to the place where he began and proceeds to dig up the truffles one by one. This is a perfectly rehable method, but it takes a good deal of time. It is used by those who have neither a trained sow nor dog and who have only a small area to work. It has one great drawback. It can only be used on those still winter days that are sunny enough to induce gnats to be on the wing. Consequently, those who depend on that method cannot say 'Let us have some truffle today.' They have to consult the oracle - the column of gnats.

It is sometimes possible to see where the truffles, though below ground, are breaking the top soil and making a cross or a star of little fissures. Such stars appear as early in the year as August and those who are not familiar with the truffle would be tempted to dig it up, for it would be found to be black, as a truffle should be, hence its name trouffle noire which has been used as the sign of an inn or two in the district. But it the truffle is then cut in half, it will be found that the black is only on the outside, that the interior is of a dirty cream colour and that it has no more flavour in that stage than a piece of soft wood. So it must be allowed to remain in the ground and ripen. Maturity is not attained until winter has arrived. It is true that some truffles are lifted in December in order to be on sale at Christmas and command a high price, but they are not at their best before the New Year, when the sangher, the wild boar, is in season too, and a mixture of the two, a pâté of wild boar with truffles in it is really something to which a poem by some gourmet might well be written.

The yield to be expected from an acre of truffle oaks? Well, it is best not to expect. The crop is as uncertain as English weather. In a good season it is possible to get as much as half a hundredweight from that area. Of recent years there has been a series of poor yields. The reason for this is just one more mystery connected with the truffle. Some peasants are of the opinion that, if May is a dry month, the yield will be poor and a number of them believe that the shortage in recent years has been due to the fact that sheep have been allowed to wander at large, through lack of people to tend to them during the war, and that their dung is inimical to the growth of truffles. That is, I think, feasible, for any manuring of the oaks would tend to make them more vigorous and healthy, and (as I said before) the existence of truffles depends on the ill health of the oak trees.

Personally I think that rainfall is the deciding factor. Moisture and warmth seem to be necessary for the growth of any kind of fungus, as we know, for example, in the case of our common mushroom. During the war this area experienced a series of rather dry summers. I should not like, however, to say just when the rain is needed to give the best result.

I have removed some of the mystery surrounding the truffle, but a good deal remains even for those who have watched its behaviour for a lifetime. There is, however, something that does not seem to vary or deteriorate - its unique flavour. It is, perhaps, best known for its use in conjunction with pâté de foie gras, foi added to this it makes one of the most prized delicacies in the world. But just as the finest wine is consumed where it is produced, so is the best food. Truffles in pâté de sanglier, mentioned above, is superior in my view, and neither of them can approach truffles and trout in mayonnaise sauce. But neither of these is to be found in any hotel, restaurant, or any public eatingplace, as far as I am aware. They appear on the table in peasant homes for special occasions, such as birthdays, weddings, and festivals, and one has to be persona grata before one is invited to join the circle of a French home, which extends to relatives on both sides of the family but to very few others.

Geese, from the liver of which the foie gras of course is made, are not much in evidence. One sees no great flocks of them, for they are just one item of the plan 'a little of everything', so it is a surprise for anyone to find a market where nothing but geese are on offer. This happens in the autumn and can be seen at Sarlat, for example. The geese are penned just as we pen sheep at our markets – in hurdles. They are all 'green', that is to say that they are not fat. They have simply been allowed to graze in their natural way throughout the summer months. The women in the town purchase them and fatten them with maize, cooping them in their back-yards, for during that process no exercise is necessary. It takes about a hundredweight of maize and five or six weeks of feeding, mostly forcible, for the geese to be fattened to perfection.

The women know quite well what they want and have a

very shrewd eye and a marvellous capacity to bargain. The selection of a goose is not a hurried matter, it is an hour or more of scouting, criticism, and joking. When a woman wants to buy, she scans a pen of geese and then points to one that she would like to examine. The buyer has a long stick with a fork on the end, not unlike a shepherd's crook. He puts this over the neck of the goose and draws it gently to him and picks up the goose by the neck, just under the head. This is the correct way to lift a goose. He will then take it in his arms, holding its wings, so that it does not flap them, and the woman will handle it all over to see that it has no deformity. Even that does not suffice. The goose is then put down in the street, when both buyer and seller will give it a walk, as solemnly as if it were a prize cow in a show ring. The object of this is to find that the bird is not lame, for though in the process of being fattened it will not have to take exercise, the women maintain that birds do not fatten well if they show any sign of lameness . . . and they are probably right.

In some towns - Cahors for one - there is a demand right through the autumn and up to Christmas for geese that are already fattened and plucked. The sight of a row of these set out on a market stall is nothing short of amazing. I have never seen anything at all like it. From only a few yards' distance one would not suppose that they were any kind of bird. Each one looks like a huge pat of butter, of the colour that this has when it is made of the milk of Guernsey or Jersey cows and they are on spring grass. These blocks are oblong in shape, 'gold as a guinea' as the old saying has it, and as in fact they are, and they are only slightly irregular in shape. The birds are so fat that there is no evidence that they have breasts, legs, or wings! They are actually nearly all fat, so that they can be pressed into any shape without difficulty, and they weigh thirty to forty pounds each. What a pat of butter!

This fat is rendered down, put into jars and serves for cooking purposes. It is to some extent its use that has made the cuisine of this region renowned throughout France. In-

deed its savour has permeated the whole world by means of the tales of travellers who have had the pleasure of visiting 'the land of all good things', as the valley of the Dordogne might well be christened.

8. Walnuts and other Good Things

I HAD known Madame Frangeas for a very long time before I knew her name, her surname, I mean. Everyone called her Clélie, or (if children) Tante Clélie. At first I thought she was their aunt. So she was to a good many in fact, but I found out after a while that she had adopted all the children of the village, or they her, and to this day I am not sure which can really claim this blood relationship.

Clélie is a woman of substance in every sense – of character, of physique, of possessions. She has a perfectly round face, cherub-like in spite of her fifty odd years and likely to remain so all her life, for the innocence of childhood and her love of all (especially of children) has grown into that eternal quality, the innocence of wisdom. Her cheeks glow as a child's at all times and her nose too when she has been cooking. In either state she looks attractive in the black clothes that she always wears, for the glow comes from within as well as without. No one can fail to feel it. She has no emborpoint and so when viewed sideways, she has just a pleasant plump figure, but she has a prodigious width across the hips, so that a rear view is astounding, incredible. I have never seen human form like it. She wears pantoufles always and slides in them on flat feet, making a sound like fallen leaves rustled by the wind. She speaks with a quiet, smooth voice, such as always seems to accompany a loving heart, accomplishes a great deal in the course of a day without ever hurrying - a sure evidence of competence - and is never perturbed. Her small kitchen is never hers. No matter what time it is, there are always a few adults or children and often a crowd. No one can pass without going in to have a chat, a smoke, or a drink, or to enjoy the atmosphere or her cooking. How she can do her work under such conditions amazes me. She will prepare a six-course meal with no sign whatever of impatience, while people jostle her as she makes an omelette, prepares a salad, dishes up a chicken, draws a cork, or cuts the bread. True, there are always the watchful eyes of those willing and eager to give her a hand in any little thing, but even so one would expect human endurance to fail occasionally. I felt sure for a long time that some day I should see her lose patience, take a broom and sweep the whole lot of us into the street; I am convinced now that I shall never see this happen.

She was married in her teens, the normal and natural time for girls to be married. The instinct of motherhood is given to be satisfied, not denied, nor abused. Our ancestors up to the Victorian era and Oriental races in all times recognized this simple fact with the result that population increased. It is only when this instinct is not given its course that we see the phenomenon of sterility, nervous 'breakdowns', mental dis-cqu'librium and discontented minds. If a girl does not find her happiness in home-making, I am perfectly certain that she will never find it anywhere else.

Clélie had five children, four boys and a girl, at regular intervals of a year and (so I have been told) without any difficulty. Praise to those hips! She would no doubt have had more, had not the shadow of war fallen across the land in 1914 and across her home two years later. Her husband was one of les enfants of France who was called upon to give his life for his country. Women who consider that their time is fully occupied with one child will appreciate that a girl with five youngsters, widowed in her twenties, needs a brave heart as well as a sound body to cope with such a situation. Fortunately she had both - and more, she was aware of the source of all strength and comfort, though she was not a church-goer and would have had no time for the external observances of religion, even if she had any belief in their necessity. The ache in her heart for the dead was assuaged in some measure by the babe at her breast and sad thoughts had to be put aside to make room for the many needs of those who could toddle.

Clélie was not dismayed at all by her task. She lived in a land in which women bear habitually half the responsibility (if not five-eighths of it!) in all practical things, and the whole of it as regards financial matters. How wise Frenchmen are in letting their wives be the keepers of the purse! A land, too, where every child from infancy upwards learns that it must find its happiness in its work. Competence was not in question. I know no girls here who are not competent to manage a home properly by the time that they are fourteen years old. They have been learning since they could walk, by helping in every detail of domestic art - yes, learning an art by the use of their eyes and common sense, not taught a science. And what a difference that makes! In the former case, the child learns to assume responsibility, to think for itself, to develop initiative and the ability to organize. In the latter case none of these qualities, so necessary in life, have an opportunity to grow. Constant and continual instruction is, in fact, the surest way of making a species of human being as nearly like a mass-produced implement as is possible.

Clélie had, like other children, been to school, but the influence of a French home – rightly renowned the world over for its solidarity – was greater than any undesirable one at school, and her brood of growing children developed a thankful heart in her for the gift of them, and thankful hearts in them for a loving mother. They are now all married with children of their own, and as all of them, children and grandchildren, find the same delight in the old home, Clélie has indeed a quiver full, whenever a jour de fête enables them to congregate. Indeed only on rare occasions have I been able to have a quiet talk with her alone, though like the rest of the community I used any excuse – or none – for going to see her. Such occasions as I have had for a chat have generally been connected with walnuts!

One day, for example, I met her as she was leaving her home with a basket on her arm.

'What mischief are you up to this afternoon?' I asked.

'Cannot you guess? Have you forgotten that it is the fête of Saint Jean tomorrow?" she replied.

I confessed that I had forgotten that it would be Midsummer Day on the morrow. True, I did know that many

customs and various operations on the farm were associated with festivals rather than with dates in the calendar, but her reply did not enlighten me, so she answered the question in my eyes.

'I am going to make some quinquina,' she said, 'and so I am going to pick some walnut leaves.'

Walnuts are the last trees to respond to the warmth of spring. Their buds consist of hard, almost black, sheaths and only after weeks of sunshine do these open grudgingly and allow the young leaves to decorate the bare silver stem with their purple tips, and it is midsummer before they have developed into their full size and deep green colour. Rubbed between the hands they give off a delicious, aromatic scent and incidentally train one's hands brown.

We picked and filled the basket with these, took them home and laid them out in the sun to dry, but as with tobacco or hay, these were not allowed to lose their colour or they would lose their flavour. The drying process was then continued in a shed, and some days later when they were quite brittle, we rubbed them between our hands till they were in small pieces - a very easy matter - and filled a number of wine bottles to about a third of their contents, poured over them enough cau-de-vie to cover them and a little more - to allow them to swell put them in a cool place and forgot them for a formight. By that time the spirit had extracted the aroma. Then we emptied the contents of the bottles one by one, strained them through a piece of muslin and put the liquid back into the bottles and filled them up with good, home-made red wine that had been heated over a fire, with twelve lumps of sugar per bottle. Then it is quinquina. Of course visitors to France can get this apéritif everywhere, but the commercial article is as poor a thing compared with Clélie's, as is, for example, a factory-made butter compared with that made in a farmhouse.

I remember on another occasion that I met Clélic with a basket on each arm. It was October and the walnuts were just beginning to fall. Glad always to be in her company, I again volunteered to help. She had three trees by the roadside at Le Bestende on the edge of a plot that had produced wheat. I took one basket and proceeded to collect nuts while she (to my surprise) collected the green husks from which they had fallen.

'What are you going to do with those?' I asked.

'Make liqueur,' she replied. 'One of the finest. Have you never tasted crème de noix? No? Well, come in this even-

ing and goûter - with coffee - instead of cognac.'

I have often wished that I had kept a list of all the delicious things that I have eaten and drunk chez Clélie in the course of years – things that she delighted to make. What a store of recipes she had! None were written down. Different dishes arrived on the table, different drinks were made according as things came in season. Judging by the still-room recipes of our ancestors, there were people like Clélie in England, and only those who have read such recipes can have any idea of the variety obtainable in a land still richer in natural riches than our own.

Clélie insisted that I should dine too. Had I not bent my back long enough in picking up walnuts to get a good appetite? Had I not carned my dinner?

Certainly, I should enjoy a dinner, even if I had not picked up any walnuts. Equally certain, too, the value of the walnuts that were in my basket was less than that of any dinner.

You are reckoning in money,' she said. 'It is I who decide this affaire. I value your help as being worth a dinner and a crème de noix. I shall expect you at seven o'clock. No refusal.'

One cannot refuse Clélie, for one does not wish to do so. Furthermore, it is difficult to pay her, even for drinks that one has ordered, for Clélie has an *auberge*, where she lives and dispenses hospitality in every form on every day of the week and at any time. She owns farms, which her sons have, houses in the village for her guests who find no room in the inn (tor it is quite small), two vineyards on the slopes, various pieces of woodland, an orchard, pasture and poplars at

various places by the riverside, numerous fields dotted about, stables and cowpens opposite the inn, which is in the village, and over all this property she has her eye and wise management. It constitutes her 'home' farm and all those who actually live in these villages have similar kinds of farms. They sound, of course, most unpractical, but in point of fact, no one has any distance to go in order to reach any of these plots, for they are all in the environs of the village.

There is no evidence that Clélie's house is an auberge. There was once upon a time. Many years ago, the face of the old stone walls was covered with cement, to make it look smart and modern, and on one side was painted Hôtel des Touristes', but the virginia creeper and wistaria which cover the iron gate and arbour on that side objected and decided to obliterate this notic and I doubt if any one knows of the 'Hôtel des Touristes'. Certainly no tourist will find it. But neither good tood nor good wine need any bush to advertise it. Personal recommend tion draws all the clientèle with which Clélie can deal. In case any reader does not know the origin of the saving that 'Good wine needs no bush', I will mention that in the northern part of France it is still quite common to see a 'bush' (frequently the top of a juniper) stuck out horizontally above the doorway of houses in villages, to indicate that wine is sold there, and I may add, too, that it is not uncommon to see similar bushes tied vertically at the entrance of farmyards to ward off evil spirits from the livestock. For all that I know, it may be as efficacious as the chemical 'dopes' of our modern veterinary science. The former can at least do no harm, which cannot, I am sure, be said of the latter.

One sees no 'bushes' in the valley of the Dordogne, for good wine is general – and good food – and all French people are well aware of it. It is the lack of 'modern conveniences' that saves it from inundation by gourmands and gourmets alike.

When I arrived 'chez Clélie' in the evening, I found a laughing company of men, women, and children congregated in the dining-room as well as in the kitchen, the chief

meeting-place. The salle-à-manger is not visible from the road. It is really a roofed terrace (attached to the house) with its three projecting sides consisting entirely of glass lights. There are a number of small tables, covered with brightly coloured oilcloth, and rush-seated or rather straw-seated chairs, and nothing more but a perfectly lovely view of the river and valley below, the river bordered by tall poplars and grey willows, the plaine (as they call it) studded with homesteads, walnut and fruit trees — as rich a land as heart could desire or eye could see.

It was dark and silent outside. Within, the electric light fell on gold, heaps of gold on the tables and floor, and even hanging from the ceiling. That was my first impression, till my eyes adjusted themselves and I recognized that the gold was maize cobs, hundreds of them. On the floor were large clothes-baskets made of peeled willow wands, of exactly the same design and make as our own, full of the cobs. The company was engaged in the process of déplissage. This consists in rolling back the sheaths that cover the corn, leaving three or four on each with which to tie two cobs together, so that they can be bung in pairs over a rope or pole. There is plenty of decoration at this time of year Rows upon rows of tobacco hang in every open shed, that does not get the sun. Rows of maize decorate verandas, already crimson with virginia creeper, balustrades, arbours, and walls everywhere on the sunny side, for maize that is to be stored needs to be quite dry. Pumpkins of all sizes and shades of lemon, gold, orange, and red are put out in any sunny spot, often on the roadside, to give evidence that the fruits of the earth can vie with the sunset.

The cobs that were not fully grown and the immature tips of others were put apart for feeding to the milking cows. Even the dry, apparently useless sheaths are not wasted. Soaked in water they are relished by the oxen, which thrive on a diet consisting mainly of straw. Even the tufts at the end of the cobs are kept and used to make a herbal tea.

Such a gathering of folk is normal here. That is the way

in which work (and many kinds of it) gets done by cooperative amusement, for such it is. No one was asked to
come and work at a price per hour. No one was asked to
help at all. One by one, Clélie's clients, as they came in for
refreshment or a chat, proceeded to join in, contributing a
joke or a story or a little piece of news as well as a pair of
hands. Unfortunately for me, the conversation was often in
patois. Words, however, are only the expression of thoughts
and feelings, and it is impossible to be in such a company
without sharing to some extent the spirit of it. Sometimes
one of the younger people would break into French, and then
I could prick up my ears.

As a rule the chatter, of as many children, goes on without a break, but on this occasion it suddenly came to a stop, when Georges Bousson entered and instead of giving the usual cheerful greeting of every client, stood still with a very serious look on his face and began, without preface: I was over at Creysse oda, to see my cousin Valentin, who lives on the hill, for he generally comes over for the Fête des Muguets, so that he can take home some lilies of the valley to his mother. She is a widow, you know She loves flowers and les muguets do not grow in their woods. We had arranged to meet at the auberge by the stream at Creysse. They are now building an annexe to it, an hotel, very fine, to catch those who catch fish, I suppose. We shared a bottle of Monbazillac, a premier grand cru of 1937. Lovely wine. Send the Château Yquem to Paris, if you will, but keep the Monbazillac and Queyssac in this region, n'est-ce pas? We talked of the crops, of friends and so on. Then Valentin, becoming serious, told me this. One night he saw in a dream or vision a human skeleton standing beside his bed and looking at him. He did not feel at all frightened. It seemed to be a friendly skeleton - if such a thing could be said of a skeleton. He felt impelled to look at it very carefully for he had never seen one before - and (strange to say) after a little while it began to move the fingers of one hand, so that he could see exactly what each joint was like and how it worked and why they could move in one direction and not

in another. The skeleton moved each joint very slowly, so that he could see everything quite clearly. Then it moved its wrist, then its elbow, then its shoulder, and so on right through its body from head to foot. On the following night the skeleton appeared again and repeated the whole performance, as if it were giving a lesson in anatomy. Valentin found it very interesting, but in time, when he thought about it, it seemed very strange - and unintelligible. He could see no reason for it. On the third night the skeleton came again, and went through the whole demonstration still more slowly, as if it was trying to make the working of every joint clear beyond all possible misunderstanding. When it had finished, it turned towards him as if it was asking if he understood. He answered in his mind, so to speak, that he did. The skeleton then bowed, disappeared, and never returned.

'Naturally he was puzzled, but a few days later the object of his visitation became apparent. He was on his way to the foire at Souillac. He had stopped for a drink at the auberge in the hamlet called Le Pigeon. A man had just been brought in with a dislocated shoulder, having fallen off a wagon. The company present were in a state of anxiety and perturbation, for (they said) Delmastre the famous bone-setter of the district had just died, and what could be done now? Valentin, to everyone's surprise, offered to try his hand at putting the shoulder back in place, and to their great surprise and to his own (he confessed) managed it without much difficulty, and in the past few months he has been called upon for several dislocations.'

Georges told his cousin's story quietly, with due restraint, to a company of open eyes and mouths. It produced a most unusual silence, which seemed at last to embarrass him, for he broke it by saying with a twinkle in his eye: 'But it is of no use for any of you to go to Valentin with your nose out of joint. He can't do anything about that sort of trouble.'

The company laughed and broke up. All the cobs stripped of their dresses were hung along the beams of the ceiling, so that they looked like golden stalactites or golden wistaria.

Once more I had enjoyed a golden hour with my simple friends. Once more I had felt how real and how sane was their way of life.

When the party had disappeared, it was time for dinner. Meals are served at the little tables in the dining-room to all comers, but I had the honour to have table d'hôte in a little Foom next to the kitchen. Table d'hôte is really a table at which host or hostess or both preside. It is being en famille. Here there was a long oval table to seat a dozen. It was made of solid walnut, like most of the furniture of peasant homes except the oldest, which is of oak. Clélie sat at the top of the table and the rest of the company consisted of a grocer and his wife from Bordeaux who had spent odd week-ends there for thirty years, a director of a bank in Périgueux who informed me that Clélie was the best cook in the world, a young Italian who had come to work at les vendanges, a middle-aged woman who helped Clélie with all her work, Clélie's eldest son who farmed on the uplands (Les Causses, as they are called) and myself.

I shall not attempt to describe the delicious meal. It seems almost unkind to make people's mouths water! I could not describe the crème de noix, which arrived as promised with the coffee, for it bears no resemblance to any liqueur with which it can be compared. I will only mention that a semblance of it, with the same designation, made in Souillac by a marchand de vin, can be bought at some hotels and cafés in the district. It is good, very good, but Clélie is not satisfied with what is good, it has to be supremely fine - the best in fact. The bottle had lost its date but she knew that it was made sometime during her husband's life, so it must have been at least thirty years old. There are many bottles in her cellar that have lost their date. It is a great place to which to have an entrée! What wonderful treasures it holds! What surprises! Whenever I wanted an exciting evening and had some friend or other with me, I was allowed to go down and choose one of the unknown and unsung poems of this cellar. There were occasional disappointments, where a cork had perished or a table wine had passed beyond its best, but in

the main the log book in my mind records a series of glorious discoveries.

Needless to say, I wanted to know how crème de noix was made and on the following day I was permitted to take part in it. The green walnut husks that Clélie had collected were put into a marble mortar and pounded into a pulp. This was quite easily done, for the freshly fallen husks are soft. As each mortar-full was pulped, it was emptied into a round upright jar of earthenware with bulging sides, similar to those that we use. This was continued till the jar was nearly full. Eau-de-vie was then poured on to this till it was quite covered (what a number of uses this home-made spirit can fulfil!) and it was then left for a fortnight, which seems to be the length of time considered necessary for this spirit to extract the flavour from any vegetable matter.

The contents of the jar were then emptied into another of similar kind, covered with fine muslin. This resultant liquid was jet black and was ladled into bottles, using a small funnel. The bottles were filled to three-quarters of their capacity to allow room for what? I wondered. Clélie made a syrup by heating sugar and a little honey in cau-devie, and allowed it to cool, before filling up the bottles. These were then corked and put into the cellar to allow Time, wonder-worker of all wines and spirits, to perform his magic art of maturing. Even when freshly made this liqueur is delicious, but when it has been forgotten for years in a cellar, those who partake of it will certainly never forget it. The sad reflection left to me is that we could make it just as well here. Walnuts are not scarce, eau-de-vie can be made of plums and, when old, will excel cognac here as in France, where a really old bottle is a connoisseur's piece, as it were, especially when it has been made of greengages.

The use of walnut leaves and husks demonstrates just two out of countless ways in which the French, knowing the true meaning of the word 'economy', are ingenious enough to invent some superb drinks with a basis of material that we should regard as worthless nowadays.

And now to the walnuts themselves. These are gathered

in some districts, such as the Limousin, but here in the Dordogne valley they are allowed to fall of their own accord. There is a good reason for this. Those which are picked are not mature and will not keep, though perfectly good for immediate eating. Like an apple gathered too soon, the kernels will shrivel up entirely. Even when allowed to fall, it is most important that they should be dried most thoroughly, and baskets full of them can be seen standing out in the sunshine during the day - and when stored they still require to be in an arry place, protected by wire netting of fine mesh, for rats and mice know all too well what the shells contain.

Walnuts are one of the 'cash' crops of the peasants, who expect the sale of them to pay all their taxes, etc. As the flowers come late in the spring and escape the frosts that do occur (though slight) up to the end of April, they have a fairly regular yield. This is due also to the fact that the trees are pruned so that all the sap runs to the extremities of the branches where the nuts are formed. It is exactly the same with nuts as with fruit. The best are those which get sunshine and air. The apples, for example, growing in the centre of a tree are poor little things that do not keep and so are nuts.

Walnuts fall quite gradually, if the weather is fine and sunny, but a heavy rain-storm will bring them down in a hurry. Human beings are not the only ones who enjoy walnuts. Where these grow in the villages – and they are dotted about anywhere – a walnut falling on the hard road makes quite a noise and there is a rush for it by any dog that hears it, just as monkeys hurry to a spot where a Brazil nut has burst its case and scattered its contents. Even poultry join in the scramble on the off chance that the shell has become broken in its fall, for they cannot crack it with their bills. Some dogs, having discovered where the nuts are to be found, behave like pigs and make a daily round, cracking the nuts and getting out the kernels. No one stops this, for a dog cannot eat many. It does not like eating shells and it takes a good deal of time to avoid them.

From this district a large quantity of walnuts is sent away, shelled and in halves. Peasants take them to the markets in the little towns, where they are bought by merchants. These take them to old women living in the towns who undertake to crack them for a given price, it being understood that payment is made only for sound halves. The women do not use nut-crackers, for these would break far too many. They use a little wooden mallet made of boxwood expressly for the purpose and holding the walnut on a block give it a tap and the walnut falls into a basket at their feet with both sides of its shell well broken. It sounds simple enough and would be, if each walnut was of the same size with the same thickness of shell, but as they all vary slightly, so each nut must be struck hard enough to crack it but not crush the kernel inside. That means a nicety of feeling that only much practice can give. Anyone who tries, and only those who have tried, can appreciate what it means to crack about fifty nuts a minute with rarely a mistake.

The walnuts which the peasants do not sell are kept partly for eating but still more for the oil that they contain. Walnut shelling or énoisement, as they call it (this is a word of local manufacture), is one of the many forms of cooperative work or amusement. It is a recreation for the long evenings. Several families collect at one house on one evening, at another on the next and so on, just as they do with the picking of grapes. It is especially at these winter gatherings that one hears all the local stories of ghosts, sorciers or wizards, and legend. In spite of the many tons of walnuts sold in the towns, there remain many more tons to keep the little mill at Bétaille busy during the winter months, expressing this wonderful oil, more precious than that of either olive or almond, used for salads with red vinegar and sauce mayonnaise.

The residue left after the process of extracting the oil is a tit-bit for milking cows, and even the shells, left at the farms, are not wasted. They are ground at the local watermill into a fine powder, light brown in colour, and the floors of brick ovens are dusted with this before the loaves are put in. In-

stead, therefore, of having ashes or cinders stuck to the bottom of the loaves, there is a smooth surface of pleasing appearance.

Those who are not connoisseurs of walnuts choose the largest, and quite naturally. In point of fact these come from the richer soils in valleys and have a far greater proportion of shell to kernel than those grown on the uplands, so when buying walnuts by weight in shell it is as well to bear this in mind.

Walnuts, valuable for their produce throughout their lives, leave in death a noble inheritance, for no wood makes finer turniture. We set such store by it, that we have used this precious thing only as a veneer on choice pieces. These peasants have used it for ages and still use it in solid form even for their kitchen furniture. When a tree has a particularly nice figuring in it, they dispose of it to some cabinet maker, and so one sees choice modern veneered walnut turnture being made now in France.

We like to see of trees growing for centuries and do our best to keep them alive as long as possible. Certainly they can be most beautiful. But to the French, this is a terrible waste of good material. They fell all their trees, orchard or forest, when they have reached their prime. As soon as they see the slightest sign of a tree being passe, it has to come down. Even so, anyone who knows France well will admit that the general beauty of this lovely land is due (to a large extent) to the wealth and variety of its trees.

Further, when a peasant decides that a walnut has to come down, he does not saw it off at ground-level as we should do, leaving the stump in the ground to be an embarrassment for a generation, preventing cultivation of that spot. He fixes a cable to a leading branch high up in the centre of the tree and has a winch in the field on which the cable is wound in order to pull the tree down in the direction chosen. Then he digs round the tree on the opposite side to this, discloses all the roots, cuts them off, and gets them out. As he works, he tightens the winch from time to time till the tree falls, pulling out, as it falls, the roots of the other half of the tree. He

has, too, an apparatus, unfamiliar to me except here, which helps to push the tree over.

Admittedly this takes longer than sawing a tree down, but the hole can be filled and another tree can be planted or the land can be included in the cultivation of the plot on which the tree was growing. 'Waste not, want not' The faithful observance of that adage through the centuries has made this a land of beauty and luxury. The utter disregard of it has made us want.

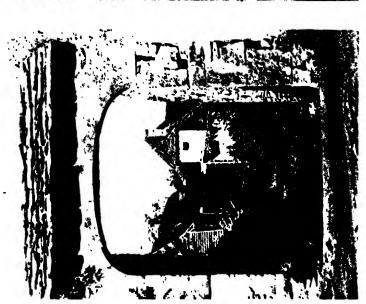


a Dordogne near Carlux

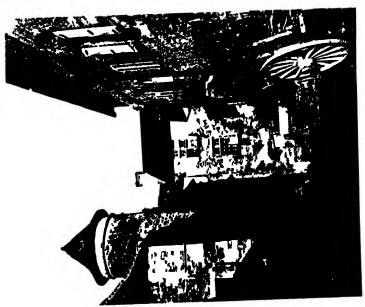


b Rue des Anglais, Carennac











a. Gathering chestnuts in the Dordogne valley



b. Church of Carsac



a. Communal oven at Féline. A fairly common sight



b. Shoeing an ox





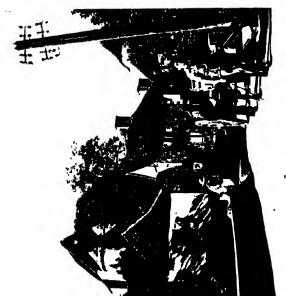
a. and b. Old farm at Lamothe-l enclon

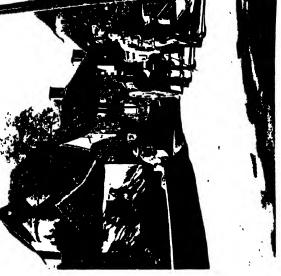


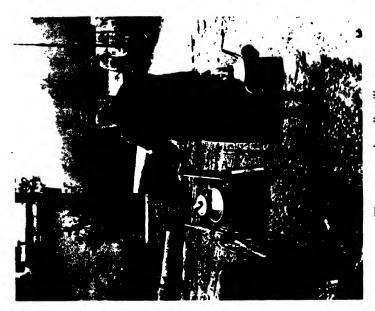
a. Farmhouse at Tauriac



b. Farm at Foussac

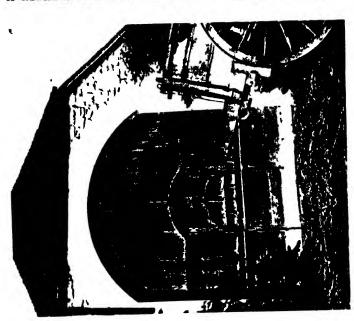




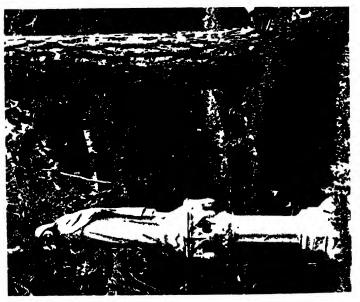


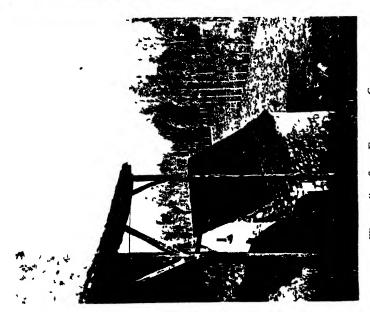


b. Avenue of planes between Bretenoux and Beaulicu

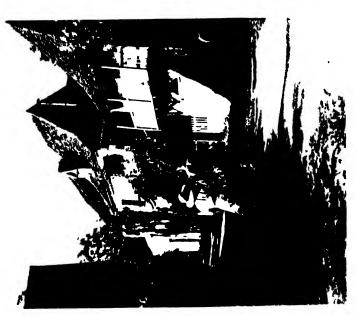


a. Barn door at Le Causse











a. Walnut trees at Griffoul



b. On the 10ad between Carennac and Saint-Cere



Ri er eie at Bretenoux



b Goose market at Sarlat



a. Faim near Betaille



b. At a farm sale



Old house with dovecote, Castelnaud



a Houses at Beaulieu



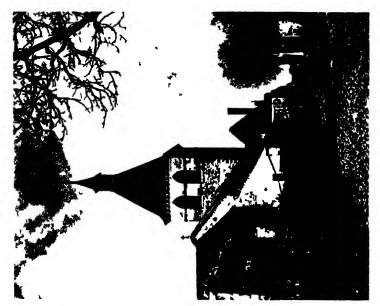
b Market square at Puybrun



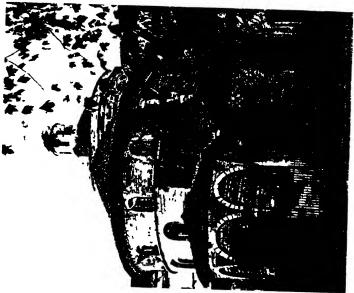
a. I bacco hanging up to diy

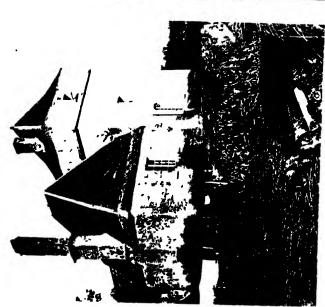


b. Farm between Saint Cere and Bretenoux









a. Farmhouse at Rocque-Gageac





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a. Market at Saint Cere

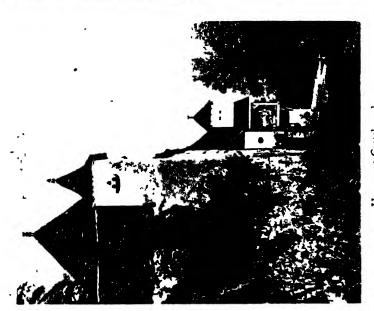


" Masclat, Lot



Old houses in Sarlat





9. About Husbandry

THE vintage, or les vendanges as it is called, lasts from the middle of September to the middle of October in the Dordogne valley. Some peasant or other will be busy picking each day, so if one is so disposed, one can pick (and eat!) grapes every day by helping different people. It would not be necessary to give a hand. One could walk round these vineyards, stop and have a chat with any of the little groups and be invited at once to help oneself to grapes or figs or anything else. When life is not on a purely financial basis, there is always time for a chat, for time is not reckoned as money, and a desire to share the good things of the earth shows itself in each and all. It is quite impossible to go into any peasant's home (or so I have found it) without being asked within two minutes to have something to eat or drink, no matter what time of day. I suppose that an interest in and an understanding of their way of life is the key that opens their hearts.

An English farmer said to me recently, 'Money speaks all languages'. It may be his experience, but if he thinks that money has a similar capacity everywhere, he should try his acumen to buy a farm from these peasants. When first I found them and joined in their work, time flew at an amazing speed, so pleasant were the hours. Days became weeks, weeks became months, and I decided that I really must have a farm of my own amongst them and be one of the community. It was clear to them all that I was in earnest, but how to get one? Well, I supposed that from time to time one came on the market by public auction. No? Never? No. That was a blow. Well, I supposed that someone would be willing to sell. No? Why not? To that they put me a question instead of an answer. Would I rather have a nice little farm or some thousands of francs - mere paper, that may at any time be worth no more than paper. Who can say? Some of us have lived long enough to see the franc become almost

worthless, but the land ... ah! c'est la richesse, la véritable richesse, n'est-ce pas? One cannot eat or drink paper, but the land gives all that man can wish, if he cultivates it as he should.'

Of course they are right, absolutely right. I could only agree, but I did want a farm and did not leave it at that. 'Surely,' I said, 'someone dies sometimes and then there must be an opportunity.'

'Yes, indeed,' they replied. 'No one has eternal life in this world, but when a farmer dies, there is always a son or a nephew or son-in-law, who will be delighted to enter on the heritage of his forebears.'

'But,' I remarked, 'there must occasionally be a case in which there is no one in the family who wishes to farm. Will you, who know the whole district, do me the service of keeping a look-out for me? I shall often come and see you, so you will not be allowed to forget.'

They promised that they would. They have been looking out for fifteen years!

It was and is possible to buy an old château with its derelict garden, woods, and acres of uncultivated land for a mere song. I have known people make such purchases - only to regret them. For they found out, after getting possession, that they could get no workers! Everyone has his own holding and cannot be bribed by money to neglect that and work for someone else. No, money does not speak every language and certainly not that of the Dordogne valley. Furthermore, so long as farming is run in Britain on purely commercial lines - and conditions make this virtually necessary - we shall remain the worst farmers in Western Europe. Of course my fellow farmers will not like me saying this. I suggest, therefore, that they make a tour from Sweden to Italy with their minds as well as their eyes wide open, and they will return, as I have done many a time, with a good helping of humble pie inside.

It is interesting to study the cropping of these peasant farms, which average perhaps only twelve acres. Statistics every-

where show, of course, that the production per acre (of crops plus livestock) is far greater on small farms than on large ones. Here we have the farm proper, that is to say, a holding that has both crops and livestock, reduced to its smallest practicable size. Large farms everywhere get far less dung than they should, because they do not carry enough livestock to make it. Market-gardens often have no livestock at all. These peasants' aim is to dung all their land every year! What a target! We have never even imagined this to be in the realm of possibility. Naturally, they do not often reach it, but the target remains, and plots that do not get it have a green crop, such as clover and rye-grass, ploughed in.

The questions that at once come to a farmer's mind are:

- 1. How can they make so much dung?
- 2. What livestock do they have?
- 3. How do they have enough straw with which to make the dung?

These questions are, of course, all inter-related, and the answers, too. They make so much dung because the whole of the stock are kept stalled all the year round. One of these small-holdings will have a pair of working oxen, a couple of cows, a yearling calf, often a milking goat, eight to ten sheep, a couple of pigs, some chickens, ducks, turkeys, and geese. They obtain enough straw by having half their holding in cereals every year.

These statements are general and need a good deal of amplification. I said that the stock are all kept indoors all the year round, and a passing traveller would come to the conclusion that a pair of oxen was the entire stock (except poultry) that was kept. He would come to the same conclusion if he travelled from the Belgian frontier right down through the centre of France to Bourges – a distance of over 300 miles. His conclusion would be utterly false. The stock are there, plenty of them, but they are not seen, at least not in the forenoons, though later in the day they will be noticed on the road verges tended by some old person or child. Throughout the north-centre of France the air is too dry for

permanent pastures to grow, so that all has to be under the plough. In the Dordogne the peasants know that they can produce more, far more by having the land under the plough than under permanent pasture, however good, and so the pasture consists of road verges, small areas near the river, where it overflows when the snows melt in the mountains, where it rises, and on hill-sides too steep to plough but not too steep to cut with mower or scythe. There is 'feed' on these pastures from mid-March to early December, and on these one will see cattle or sheep being tended towards evening.

An East Anglian farmer, who came down in the middle of September to see things for himself, remarked to me that it was strange that these peasants grew no corn at all. No livestock and no corn! That is how reliable are travellers' tales. First impressions are invariably false of any country. We get a no more faithful picture of France than the Americans do of England, for example, in touring. No country wears its heart on its sleeve or parades its beauties on the main highways.

As I said before, these peasants have half their farm in cereals, nearly always wheat but occasionally wheat and a little rye, but their harvest of wheat begins early in July and another crop is covering the ground by the middle of September, when my friend saw it. The wheat may have been undersown with clover and rye-grass or it may have been cultivated, harrowed and broadcast with turnip seed or undersown with lucerne or ploughed and sown with buck-wheat, which grows so fast that it is ripe and threshed, generally in the field, by the end of September or early October.

Though wheat is half the acreage, it must not be imagined as in one piece. The whole farm is divided up into small plots, all of which are alternatively in wheat and légumes, which (to them) represent not merely leguminous crops but anything except cereals or buck-wheat, called blé noir because it is the dark-seeded variety that they grow. The légumes comprise potatoes, maize, cabbages, broad beans, peas, haricot beans, artichokes (used almost entirely for

stock), sugar-mangold, melons, pumpkins, tobacco, carrot, onions, turnips, swedes, etc. Quite often one sees asparagus, grown as always in France in rows about four feet apart and a good yard between each pied or plant. In the first year peas will be grown between these rows but thereafter nothing. The roots of asparagus, if allowed the room that they need, are like the tentacles of an octopus and need a yard of ground in diameter. It is this wide planting that is responsible to a considerable degree for the very fine asparagus that one gets everywhere in France. It is planted on the poorest, lightest, hottest sand, wherever that is found, about nine inches deep, in trenches liberally supplied with dung and gets fairly frequent dressings of agricultural salt. It is not cut till it is three years old and only lightly then. The soil is pulled up over each head, so that it looks like a large molehill. When a head just shows itself to be breaking the 'molehill', the sand is pulled away by hand and the asparagus cut with a sharp, semicircular gouge, which passes halfway round the asparagus. Care is taken to cut right down against the stool, so as to leave no stem to protrude and weaken the plant.

Cabbages of various kinds familiar to us are grown in places where they get the most shade or the most moisture possible, for the temperature, especially in summer, is considerably higher than ours. A favourite for stock feed is of the type that is known as the Jersey walking-stick. This grows perfectly straight, to a height of five feet or more, throwing a profusion of leaves up the stalk. These are broken off as they mature, leaving always a crown of leaves at the top, so that the bare stalks grow ever taller.

Artichokes are cultivated in the same way as we treat potatoes, and grow from ten to twelve feet high. When in full flower in October, they gladden the landscape with their sunshine, for of course they are of the sunflower family. Pigs have the pleasure of being fattened on these and sweet chestnuts, either cooked or raw. What delicious hams and bacon these produce, no one can imagine.

Maize is sown in rows from May onwards, with a haricot

bean or a few peas between each. Here is a mutual sympathy between plants which seems to benefit both. What a huge unexplored field there awaits us in this matter of affinities in plants! We know of a few, such as a combination of colery and leeks, of potatoes and peas, of onions and lettuce, of peas and carrots, of maize and tomatoes, of kohl rabi and beetroot, but how sadly deficient is our knowledge. The earlier sowings of maize ripen of course and are stored for winter use, while the later ones are cut green for fodder. I have never seen silage made. No plot would be large enough to make it practicable and rain never lasts long enough to spoil any hay, whether made of pasture grass or leys. The general economy of the farm consists in producing a continuous succession of crops, providing an immense variety of food for man and beast. If variety is the spice of life, here it is in fullness. Such variety does not mean merely a wonderfully balanced diet. It means also a constant change of work, which makes that, too, far more interesting. How appallingly dull it is to sit on a tractor with humped back and cold feet ploughing the same field day after day! How can anyone enjoy that except a youngster in his first enthusiasm?

Here I should mention that the plough used is of the one-way variety common throughout France and known as the Double Brabant. Anyone who has used this type of plough would never use another, unless he were mad The width and depth of furrow can be adjusted with the greatest ease, and when a straight furrow has been taken out along one side of the plot, the plough will run dead true without touching it. It has no handles. It is turned over at the end of each furrow by releasing a catch. One can walk beside it or sit on it. The peasant walks in front of it and his ox-team The result is a plot of perfectly straight 'stitches' without any ridges or furrows and with no foot of unploughed land between one plot and another, for everyone ploughs right up to his neighbour's land. So there are no weeds, because there is no place for them to grow except on the road verges.

I mentioned that there were no hedges to cut or neglect, to harbour weeds and pests of all sorts, animals, bird, or insect. The idea, which seems to prevail in Britain, viz. that a vast number of birds is needed to keep insects under control, is completely refuted here. There are hardly any blackbirds or thrushes, no clouds of chaffinches, starlings, and sparrows – so that no fruit has to be netted and no bird-scaring is required. Everyone can gather all the strawberries that he grows, everyone can grow just one cherry tree, if he only has room for one, and be allowed to have all the cherries without fear of loss from birds or human hands. 'Scrounging' truit is never done – even by mischievous children. Thett – c'est un crime! and was recognized as such once upon a time in every land.

But there are vast quantities of swallows, warblers by the river and in the woods, and nightingales are so plentiful that one can travel for nules and never be beyond the range of their song. They prefer the waterside to the high hills, because (I suppose) there are more insects there. There is a difference too in the behaviour of these songsters in England and France. In England they sing for about three weeks, occasionally a month, and then are silent. In France, both on the estate that I managed in Seine-et-Marne and here in the Dordogne valley, they begin their song in early April, sing right through May and June and half-way through July. They stop only when it becomes so hot that the peasants find it necessary to have a siesta in the middle of the day. Then the crickets, who have been making the 'welkin ring' for weeks (and there are so many that one cannot isolate one from another), are joined by the cicadas, who simply shrick their delight in the warmth.

One cannot help feeling that the joie de vivre which gladdens human hearts affects also the nightingales and, for that matter, the woodlarks too, for from dayspring to dusk week after week throughout late summer and early autumn right up to December their pure liquid lyrics are like a benison over the fertile fields and contented workers. For me no bird has sweeter voice or tenderer message.

One sees as a rule a small patch of vines on each farm, but the soil in the valley, though producing excellent grapes for the table, is not suited for producing good wine, so each peasant has a vineyard on a neighbouring hill on one side or other of the valley, just as he also has some hill pasture and woodland. His land is not in a ring fence, like ours, for there are no fences, nor is all his land in one bloc. It is dotted about all over the place, in order that each farm may have all that it needs to carry out the accepted aim of un peu du tout. English parishes used to be so arranged (and some still are) so that they too might have a portion of every kind of soil in the district. If it makes it more convenient to have a compact farm, there is a loss in another way, and anyone who has some light soil, which he can work in any weather, will know what that means to an otherwise all-clay farm, for example.

The peasants use no coal. Their woodlands supply all their fuel and building materials for repairs. French stoves, like Swedish and other Continental ones, are extremely good, both for cooking and heating. The metal of which they are made is not like that of our cast-iron ranges. It heats very quickly to a great heat, and their ranges are a joy for any cook. They do not consume vast quantities of fuel, are not of the open-fire type, and the heat does not, because it cannot, go straight up the chimney. The draught can be regulated to a nicety. I have had slow combustion stoves, burning nothing but old roots, etc., keep in day and night for weeks on end. With such ranges and stoves in the countryside of Britain, the wood that is 'wasted' on open fires and the smaller wood that is allowed to rot or be burned, because it does not 'pay' to make faggots of it, would do all the cooking and heating in our rural homes and save all the coal that is now brought there. It is indeed a case of 'carting coals to Newcastle', but is alas! only one of the many ways in which we fail to make use of our natural resources. With the ever-dwindling supplies of food and timber in the world, failure to pay any serious attention to these primary needs is little short of lunacy.

In the list of livestock I forgot the smallest, that is, the pigeon. The relative importance of this in the past is made

evident by the fact that in very many cases the pigeonnier was incorporated in the house, but one also sees, as in England, dovecots of considerable size standing on piers or solid foundations forming a store-house beneath. These, if satisfactory at one time, are certainly not so today. I have never seen pigeons in occupation of them. They show strong preference for living high above ground, the highest pigeonniers in the district being the ones that are occupied. The largest and most populated that I know is at Mézèls, where a steep cliff-face has been so adapted by some mural construction over the face of a cave as to form a large pigeonnier.

Finally, there are walnuts. These are a crop of major import. They are no increly planted along the road verges but also in the fields in row set wide apart. As walnuts appreciate rich soil, they combine well with farm crops. Their yield is such that at the moment they are the most profitable (in terms of money) crop on the farm. There are thousands upon thousands of these beautiful trees, which contrasting with the poplars by the river contribute so much to this lovely landscape.

There are no, or very few gardens, for there is such an abundance of vegetables in their plots. This is just as well, for the farmer is notoriously a bad gardener, not deliberately, but simply because he must of necessity give his first attention to the larger areas of land. Nevertheless he generally finds room somewhere for a few fruit trees such as peach, apricot, greengage, cherry, pear, apple, fig, and dessert grape trained on the sunny side of the house or outbuildings, so that he really does live up to his metto of a little of everything.

It is quite impossible to find out the total yield in a year of any holding, for no peasant keeps an account of any kind, but the amount per 100 acres must be so large that the produce from a similar acreage anywhere in Britain (where the soil by nature is far richer than in France) would be insignificant in comparison. It is only necessary to consider, for example, the amount of cattle. There must be on each

100 acres between 35 and 40 head of fully grown cows or oxen for a start, fed entirely on a home-produced diet, and that is only one item. I need not continue, need I? to add up the head of sheep, pigs, poultry, and fruit. Does any 100-acre farmer in Britain think that he can approach this production? If so, I should like to hear from him.

And we pity the poor peasant. What a farce. While we talk about a higher standard of living, he has had for centuries a luxurious one, of which we are completely ignorant and which will clude us for ever, unless or until we decide to return to the principles that he follows and that our ancestors knew. Distasteful as this would be to those who regard 'progress' as a sort of inevitable onward march, the factor of famine which faces the whole world is likely to compel the modern world to change its view that 'you cannot put the clock back'. Every other civilization has, no doubt, had a similar outlook, and has been disillusioned in a most unpleasant way. The Mechanical Age, being fundamentally a denial of eternal laws, will pay the penalty, like all former civilizations, for breaking them. Make no mistake about that. The day or way of its fall, God alone knows, but only the blind materialist can fail to see the impending doom.

French townspeople do not pity the peasant. Far from it. Some show resentment at his having such luxury. Others envy him, and an enormous number are saving as much and as fast as they can in order to buy a little property of their own, in order that they too may enjoy the fruits of the earth. In France town and country are not divorced, as in England. Nearly half the populace live in the country, that is on the land or in little towns (not exceeding 3,000 inhabitants) which are but centres of rural craft and commerce. The other half, or as many of them as are able, visit relatives in the country and spend their vacations there. Consequently even the townsfolk are not ignorant of rural life and work. They know quite well the skill entailed and the reward it gives. That is why agriculture is not at the mercy of political makeshifts. The farmer does not have to devise means of

'making farming pay'. If he farms well or even reasonably well, he has no financial worries. Cheap imported food is not allowed to ruin him. It is a national policy to grow the nation's food, for all depends on a nation being properly fed. That policy is outside and above all politics, and it goes on just the same, no matter what party is in power or what intrigues are taking place in government quarters. We should not be deceived into thinking that France is in a mess, because its politics are. At heart it is sound and very rich - in crops, stock, orchards, forests, and vineyards, not to mention great wealth in its rivers. The fact is that French politicians have been utterly discredited in the eyes of the French themselves for a generation or two, especially in the eyes of the country folk. After the Franco-German war they 'forked out and paid in tv o years what the Germans thought would take a century The peasant trusted the politicians then. Not so today. They have enough gold buried now on their farms to make any external aid unnecessary, but successive governments have been trying to induce them to dig it up. As, however, they do not trust the politicians to put it to good use, it remains where it is and what it is - a sum believed to exceed by far that held by the Bank of France itself.

We are all aware, of course, that the man who has only a few cows and manages them himself entirely, giving to each the individual attention necessary, can beat the big herd in every way, just as these peasant holdings beat any large farm. As each animal is born, it is taken in hand and trained, as we train our pets, to come to a call and do what it is asked. There is no more difficulty whatever with cattle, sheep, pigs, or goats than there is with dogs And what trouble this saves in the course of an animal's lifetime! No rounding-up of sheep, no chasing after cows, no loading of squeaking sows when they have to be taken to the boar. The owner simply walks in front and they follow. It is a delight to me to see such treatment and to go to market, where every fortnight one can see beautiful 'finished' calves with not a 'scrub' amongst them. The animals are all tied up on their arrival,

but there is no shouting, no bellowing, no beating, no bewildered or frightened animal. Every animal can be approached and handled. It is all a sort of pleasant family party more than anything else. I hope that none of these peasants ever come to see an English market. If I were there, very shame would make me wish that the earth would swallow me up!

Those of us who pass our lives on the land have, I think, certain common experiences. I should like to mention two. When we are young, our attitude towards the land is like that towards life itself. It is our way that we want to go. So we plan what we propose to do with our fields. Experience, sometimes costly, shows us sooner or later that success is not quite so simple as it seemed, and gradually we come to realize that we cannot impose our will on others or on the land. Both object, the latter mutely, it is true, but in no less incisive manner. Eventually with chastened spirit we turn towards Mother Earth a humbled and respectful eye, being willing to learn at last what she can teach us. Certain conditions are seen to be necessary everywhere, the main one being that the soil should have plenty of 'body' or humus. Our primary concern, therefore, is how to obtain and maintain it. Soil and climate, not we, will suggest, if not dictate. the best methods for us to employ, and they will vary not merely from land to land, from parish to parish, but even from field to field and indeed from one part of a field to another. Incidentally when this latter is the case, it is better to divide the field up according to the divergent nature of its soil. How often does one see semi-failure year after year in a field of this kind belonging to some farmer who refuses to learn his lessons! Such folly is never committed by the peasants. They and their forebears have been to school for very many centuries. They know and have known their catechism of the earth by heart, and it will be an evil day if they are seduced from it by scientific theories.

Secondly, I suppose that most of us pride ourselves that we have learned in a lifetime of farming to do some one thing at least really well. I fancied, for example, that I could

make really good hay. In my opinion hay that was not made and in stack by Midsummer Day was of little value. No one is fool enough to leave his corn standing till the grain falls on the ground, when cut, but most farmers seemed (and many still secm) fools enough to do the same with grass. Now grass, from which the seed has fallen, is to my mind just straw, for after all the cereals are only developments of the grasses. So I always cut early, turn the swathe as soon as it is cut, and get hay dry without losing its colour as fast as weather permits. Yes -- that makes good hay, but I have seen better, made by peasants on the Swiss mountains and in the Dordogne valley - superb hay, made by the latter regularly even in October and November. The method is so simple and the resultant 'my is as near perfection as anything can be. For those who are prepared to change from a traditional but bad way to another traditional but good one, here are the details.

We are all agreed that, rass has its highest nutritive value when it is young and in fact before it runs to stalk. Grass cut at this stage (say) when about six inches high, and dried by some artificial process, is a complete food for stock, provided of course that the pasture from which it is made consists of all the plants needed for a balanced ration. Rye-grass and clover alone do not fulfil this condition. Like bread and cheese, they are both good foods, but no human being will thrive for long, if confined to the latter, and no cattle will keep well for long on the former. No experiments are necessary to demonstrate that. Common sense perceives that it is certain to be so.

The peasants' pastures contain all manner of plants and are cut with mower or by hand, where slopes are too steep for a mower. They are cut when about six inches high. This means that the swathe is so light that it begins to dry at once – all of it: whereas a heavy swathe of long stuff would dry on top but not underneath. Cutting is done, of course, in the morning, and the grass is raked into rows in the afternoon, then put into 'cocks' and carted, if found to be dry enough. If the peasant is not satisfied that it is dry enough

(and it seldom is in October or November), it is just scattered roughly about the next morning and carted in the afternoon. At most two fine days are needed for such haymaking. It can be commenced in the spring and continued throughout the summer according as the grass grows long enough for cutting. Such hay packs very tightly and ricks need to be only about half the size of ours. The hay too weighs far more heavily than ours and must be fed sparingly, for it is all nutriment. When a side-delivery rake is used in conjunction with a hay-loader such haymaking becomes the easiest job on the farm, and even in our uncertain climate, two fine days on end occur frequently enough to make hay – perfect hay – several times in even the worst summer.

I should add that dry days are more important than sunny ones, for sun can do just as much harm to grass (or tobacco) as rain. A little sun is beneficial, of course, as a drying agent, but the farmer who leaves his swathes on the ground till they have lost all their green colour should give up his farm and take up some other kind of work, in which the capacity for careful observation is not of such importance as it is in farming.

10. Old England in France

We are familiar in England with quite a number of families who have French names, a few of them from the Norman invasion, a number from the Huguenots who fled here during the religious wars in France. The reverse is not common. One does not often come across French families having English names, except in the Atlantic ports, where trade between the two countries has left behind an occasional settler. It was, therefore, a great surprise to me to find a number of English names amongst these peasants in a radius of about 30 miles, far from the sea or any town, in fact, 150 miles east of Bordeaux, 55 miles south of Limoges, 50-odd miles north of Cahors, as far indeed as one can get from modern progress in France.

Here, for example, are names that I have seen on farm vehicles in the markets, on tombstones, in parish records, and so on – Bailey, Lambert, Portman, Abel, Tavern, Meynel, Williams, Maynard, Rhodes, Mevrick (now written Merrik); Bruce (now spelt Brousse), Bennett, Martin, and no doubt there are others. I have not looked for them. The above are some that I have just noticed *en passant*. Nor are the English names confined to surnames. One finds the same in Christian names, such as Alfred, Arthur, Betty, Richard, Nancy, etc., and even the dogs do not escape. Dick is the favourite for sporting dogs, Bob is common, Black to oxen or cows, and strange to say, Bobbie and Tommy are applied to bitches.

Naturally this awakened my curiosity. I wanted to turn back the pages of history. Unfortunately when I was at school the teaching of history was confined in the main to wars and laws, kings and conquerors. The social life of our ancestors, of which I should have liked to hear, was not mentioned. I turned, therefore, to a historical scholar, with first-class honours in the Cambridge Tripos, with thirty years' experience of teaching history, with a love of France and

wide acquaintance with it. I was disappointed. The information that I got was meagre. It seems that Aquitaine, that large old province of France, became part of the English Crown in 1150, when Eleanor, its owner, married Henry the First. As far as our history records, it remained more or less such a part for three hundred years, but of what we were doing there throughout that long period, there is no real connected story.

The story is written clearly enough for eyes to see - at least in the valley of the Dordognes: local historians have plenty to say about the occupation of Les Anglais and local tradition coincides with it. The story is by no means prejudicial to us. I have mentioned the Château des Anglais at Autoire (there are two other Châteaux des Anglais in the region, at Grèzes and at Cabrerets) and local inhabitants of various villages claim - not without some vestige of pride, it seems to me - that the English built the church and every house in the place. Certainly nearly all the houses in Tauriac, Magnol, and Carennac (to mention only three) are of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries and the last-named still has its rue des Anglais. Probably the most noteworthy and outstanding English work is the examples of deliberate planning of new towns. These planned villages, known as bastides, are quite unlike the villages that grew up, like our home villages, little by little at the desire and to the design of the individual owner. Puybrun and Bretenoux are two examples, but by far the most remarkable is Montpazier, known as the English bastide. It was planned and planted right out in an open and uninhabited plain and still remains in isolation. The plan for all these bastides was the same. It consisted in building the 'town' around a central square - an actual square - with roads going out at right angles in every direction, thus forestalling a similar method used in the U.S.A. five hundred years later. Round the square are arcades. In the case of Montpazier these were very ambitious. The arcades have not merely houses built above them but underneath, instead of shops, is a carriage-way, very wide and high enough for a cart, even when loaded (say) with hay, to pass

with ease. The effect is really magnificent. One cannot guess what the whole plan of these towns was going to be, for the English departed from the district after the battle of Cartif lon (east of Bordeaux) in 1453 and little has been added them. All of these bastides seem in a sense to be out of place and out of keeping, for they make the fundamental error of the architect, who decides what he wants. Though made of local material, they have not grown out of the soil or out of the heart of individuals. They are artificial but not art. They are something meant primarily to look at rather than to live in. They have symmetry, a thing that nature never has, instead of harmony, which is everywhere around. Time has placed its kindly hand upon them and given them some grace, but they look and will continue to look modern inventions compared with the older villages. These bastides were, in fact, the last marks in stone of our occupation.

In this district, apart from the strangeness of the language, the Englishman will feel himself quite at home. He will look upon faces nearly all of which might be English. He will look upon a landscape that could remind him of the Wye valley around Tintern. He will see all his familiar trees - and a few added - all his familiar wild-flowers, and when he knows these people, he will find a similar temperament. There is indeed very little French blood here and no sympathy for the French either, though there is a great love of country. To these peasants this is France, the real France. As a matter of fact, the Romans found this valley so delectable that they were loath to leave it. The visible evidence of their stay is the Latin termination to most of the village names and farin names and the many Roman tiles that one sees embedded in walls and chimneys. When we arrived, I think that the Roman settlers had become the local inhabitants and I feel almost certain that in an occupation of three hundred years we became the local inhabitants too, at least in the 'delectable valley' and its immediate surroundings. Certain it is that this was not considered a foreign possession of Britain, being actually a part of the Crown, just as Algeria today is reckoned as part of France, and many families had

houses both here and in England. We find, for example, Simon de Montfort figuring prominently in English affairs, but we find his château, the Château de Montfort, built on a rock overhanging the Dordogne river - overhanging to such an extent that some of it has crashed into the river below. And we find English people, like the Lamberts, figuring prominently in French affairs in this district. It is safe to say, in fact, that through those centuries the life on each side of the Channel was the same and that a common language -Norman-English - was used to a considerable extent. Evidence of this is to be found on the tombstones and brasses on tombs in the churches; all of which are similar to the styles that we call the Norman and Early English periods. There is only one unfamiliar feature. One sees fairly often a tower of hexagonal form - sometimes in addition to the usual one - and I do not recollect seeing this anywhere in England, though it may occur.

As the Norman and Early English styles, particularly the former, have always appealed to me personally far more than those of the periods that followed, the sight of the churches connects them in my mind with those at home, but it is the old villages themselves that are my chief delight. They and the lives of the peasants themselves answered a question that our historians had not even mentioned, when I was at school. That question came into my mind when I was a boy and it happened thus.

Though my father was a farmer he had many interests, some of these being in archaeology, heraldry, ecclesiastical architecture, old furniture (of which our home was full), and indeed of any record left by our ancestors. To satisfy this to some extent he combined business with pleasure.

As a grower of hops he decided to cut out the merchant—and his profit—and sell his hops direct to the brewers. There were brewers then in every town, even small ones, and in many villages too, and he travelled England to show them samples of his hops. I accompanied him frequently as a boy, and I believe that I had seen every cathedral of England and Wales and hundreds of churches by the time I was fourteen

years old. I suppose that in these towns I was absorbing all unconsciously the language and principles of architecture, as a child learns a foreign tongue, as well as his own, when he hears it spoken daily, for when later in life I came to design and build my own home and, as a result of that, homes for others on request, it did not present any difficulty whateger. I consider this to be perfectly normal or would be normal if every child was allowed and encouraged to use his common sense and powers of observation - God's gifts to us all - instead of having his life and thought ordered from the time he can walk. Looking backwards I can see that the greatest blessing to me was the fact that I was allowed the freedom to learn to use my hands in any and every way that I chose - in kitchen, garden, or on the farm - and could not read or write till I was ten years old. I had no inclination in that direction and no compulsion was used, but I could cook, sew, knit, handle spade or fork, milk, pitch hay, and so on and I found it all good, extremely good fun - as it should be. The love of being useful and doing something as well as we can is the secret of happiness.

There is and can be no such thing as drudgery when that love pervades household or a community. Further, such love produces forms of beauty in all its activities and through them in its surroundings.

When one looks upon these villages in the Dordogne valley, as upon the unspoilt ones in Britain, one recognizes at once that a very different spirit prompted their building than that of any modern one, even if it is called a Garden City. Feeling this strongly during my travels with my father, I wondered how our ancestors lived. The extraordinary beauty of the few dwellings of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries left intact to us that we came across occasionally in country-side or village or squashed between more modern houses in towns, excited specially my curiosity and made me long to come across a whole village of those early ages. I had, in time, to accept the fact that none had survived in Britain, and my imagination could not fill up the gaps, or my dreams either!

I have the answer now. Here in the villages mentioned and

in various others one can see not only individual houses of those early days intact, but the villages themselves. Of course some houses have disappeared and there are a few of succeeding centuries, but little imagination is needed to visualize the original as the Norman-English created it. It is curious to see how utterly modern and out of place even a house of (say) about A.D. 1500 appears amongst these solid, lovely stone dwellings with their mottled old tiles, which change colour with changing light all the day long, looking grey at dawn, a reddish-fawn at noon, and a purple-brown at sundown.

And as for the way our ancestors lived, there can hardly be any change. The modern mower has been introduced and the threshing drum. The spinning-wheel and loom have almost disappeared, though both were brought out during the years of war, but the ox-team still decides the tempo of life and is responsible for all the cultivation and haulage. The watermills still provide the power for grinding the corn and maize, the brick ovens are in constant use turning out good wholemeal bread, one can still see women spinning with nothing but a distaff, the teazle is still grown for carding, the mattress-maker is still in evidence, making thick soft mattresses for these peasant homes out of their own wool. The trade of matelassier still goes on from father to son, and it is very easy to know when a village expects him. The clothes-line will be draped right across a field, and washed wool will be drying on it looking like a long row of glistening streamers. The mattress-maker uses a curious little apparatus that he works by hand. He feeds the wool into a little curved trough and pulls to and fro a sort of miniature swing that has steel teeth on it, which instead of carding the wool, pulls it into small tassels, as it were, which fall into a heap and are ready for filling the mattress. While talking one day to a matelassier, whom I know well, I was surprised to hear that his great-great-grandfather had imported this implement from England! It was and is still in excellent con-dition.

Though the modern threshing drum is used for cereals,

the peasants use a hand-winnowing machine, similar to that used by our grandparents, for cleaning their seed corn, and the flail is still very much in evidence, especially for threshing the white haricot beans, grown by all and appreciated by every cook, particularly in soups during the winter months. Threshing with a flail appears to be the easiest thing in the world. Just a turn of the wrist, followed by a downward stroke, and the flail has landed exactly on the desired spot. Yes, it has in the hands of these peasants, men and women. But try it and mind your head!

Flailing is done by one or two people. When two are at work at the same time, they must keep perfect time with their strokes or fail will fall upon flail. This must need considerable practice, but a sight that fascinated me was to see three members of the Madrange family (father, mother, and younger son) flailing in perfect unison and each bringing his flail down at sixty strokes to the minute. This is about the average rate in the district. They had put down haricot beans covering a space of forty-five yards long by two yards wide, when I happened to have the company of two English farmer friends. I asked my friends how long they thought it would take to thresh the lot.

'All day, if they don't waste time,' was the agreed estimate. I said nothing. I just waited to see their surprise. The beans were all threshed in an hour. It is as simple and as quick as that for those who have acquired the art, which is not in danger of being lost. Of that one can be sure, for one sees children busy at times making little flails and using them.

After watching this threshing operation my friends came to the conclusion that we had gained nothing, not even time, by the introduction of the threshing drum. As it needs seven men at least to work one, they calculated that seven experts with a flail would do the work just as quickly. I suspect that many of the machines that we use do not save us the time that we imagine, though they increase the cost of farming to a prodigious amount. Indeed, if our methods of farming were regulated solely on the basis of cost, we should use

horses or even oxen, not tractors, for all those who have compared these by keeping accurate accounts have found animals to be cheaper in the long run, even in the U.S.A., where conditions favour the most economical use of the tractor.

It will no doubt surprise others, as it did me, that the flail is still in use in England. I found this out in my search for 'bygones' – the tools of our ancestors – which I like to collect, not merely as museum pieces but for use. A modern spade, or fork, or bill-hook is worn out in a few years, for it has steel only in its point, while its old counterpart lasts a lifetime, having steel throughout it, sandwiched (as it were) between iron.

There is a general delusion that, when everything is handmade, people must work like slaves through all the hours of daylight. It is forgotten or overlooked that when things are made to last and do last, replacements are necessary only after many years of use. The fact that there were about twenty-six public holidays a year in the Middle Ages, compared with three or four now, tells its own story. It is we who have become slaves, slaves to money and machines through the worship of them.

While having a drink at an inn in Lincolnshire in the company of a number of agricultural workers, I asked if anyone happened to have seen a flail hanging up in any old barn or shed. One of the company said that he knew a man who had two, gave me his name and address, and so I called when I found myself in that district. The conversation that ensued went like this:

I: 'I understand that you have an old flail?'

He: 'Yes: I have two, in fact.'

I: 'I wonder if you would be good enough to let me see them?'

He: 'I'm sorry. They are not in the house at the moment. They're in use.'

I: 'In use for what?'

He: 'For threshing of course. For what else could one use them? I let them out on hire.'

They were, in fact, being used for threshing out peas and beans by those who had not enough to warrant the use of a threshing drum.

There are always many lovely sunny days in the autumn in the Dordogne valley, and the flails are busy out of doors.

Any nice smooth piece of road that is convenient to any householder will be swept and used as a threshing floor, and the 45 × 2 yards that the Madrange family (and others) use is the nice smooth surface of the road carried by the suspension bridge that now replaces the old wooden bridge at La Bestende! They do not stop the traffic, leaving half the width of the road for vehicles to pass. The local police approves of this, having local sympathy and understanding. After all, when a road has such a suitable surface for threshing, why should it not be used as such? Why not indeed? The road is public property. But what would happen, I wonder, in England! I fancy that an unhindered flow of traffic going to a football match would be considered more important than thresting out anything used for human food, so topsy-turvy can mentality become.

The most popular threshing floor is naturally the square or oblong of smoothed concrete that local councils are thoughtful enough to lay in any convenient public place, generally in front of the matrie, so that the population can dance on the National Day of Rejoicing (14 July) as well as on local days of fête – yes, and dance all night long to a band, also provided by the commune, free of charge to all, with seats placed around the dance-floor, also free of charge, for the old people to sit and enjoy seeing their juniors enjoy themselves.

Neither this concrete floor nor the roads have been put down for threshing purposes, and legally they cannot be used for the purpose. The laws of France are made for the French by the French, but these peasants decide for themselves if it is convenient to break them or not. They have always valued their independence and freedom, and have it in a measure that we have not known for generations. There is a law, for example, as in Britain, that vehicles must carry a light after dark and that those in charge of cattle on the roads must do the same. If a peasant finds that it helps him to have a light on his cycle at night, he has one. If he does not find it so, he goes without, but I have never seen a light on a cart of any kind nor is there a place for one. There is a 'close' season for shooting wild boar, but if the peasants decide that they would like a boar hunt out of season, they will have one, and the local mayor will be one of the party. They got on very well without Paris and its government during the war, being in fact cut off entirely from it, and they do not want its interference now or at any time. They are selfcontained - in luxury. They are truly free, independent, democratic. It is farcical for the great democracies to describe themselves as either of these three. Their lives are ordered by an international bank, industrial combines, the money system, paid labour, and so on. These peasants though owning money and having gold, plenty of it, buried, refuse to be enmeshed in the tentacles of Mammon. If they awakened in the morning to find that during the night all the money in the world had been 'spooked' away, they would find no inconvenience whatever, for they would still be rich in all the things that man needs to live a full life in this world. And in such an eventuality, what would our boasted civilization look like?

These peasants own their own houses, fields, vineyards, plots of woodland, whether they are farmers, carpenters, wheelwrights, masons, cobblers, or so on. No one is a complete specialist, even when he has a handicraft. Every one is his own master, does his own work in his own way and his own time. Ownership is the very basis of freedom and independence – and as far as the land is concerned full production from it is possible only under individual ownership. A paid agricultural worker or a tenant, for that matter, cannot be expected to do as well by the land as he would if he owned it. Everyone has a right to sunshine and air and should have a right to as much of the earth as he and his family can cultivate – but no more. In a Christian community – Christian in fact, I mean – no one would be denied this right and no

one would want to possess more than he could cultivate well.

Though these peasants claim to speak French as well as their own patois, it is of a queer kind. It reminds me very much of the sort of French heard in my school days taught by an Englishman who had never been to France and did not know much about its pronunciation. For example, words ending in 's' or 't' sound very funny if these letters are pronounced when they should be mute. It is amusing to hear English words like 'dog', 'cat', and 'country' (pronounced exactly as we pronounce them) occurring in daily conversation. The most remarkable thing, however, is to hear the vowel 'a' pronounced 'eh' as in England, when it is 'ah' throughout the rest of Europe. This is an astonishing survival.

There is in the per ants' manners too a far greater similarity to English than French. They show none of the external forms of politesse. In France proper one addresses every man as 'monsieut, whether he is doctor, butcher, clerk, porter, or anything. One would not dream of saying plain Bon jour'. It would be Bon jour, monsieur'. Not so with these peasants. The greeting is, as with us, a simple 'Good morning'. In France proper, when introduced to anyone, respect is shown by a bow and the customary verbal niceties. Not so with these peasants. They never bow.... They owe no man money, manners, or humble demeanour. They are as short and bluff as we - perhaps even more so, for they are literally far more free and independent. In France proper no one would say 'I am going to see Gautier', no matter who he happened to be. It would be, 'I am going to see Monsieur Gautier'. Not so with these peasants. They say simply, as we do, 'I am going to Portman's or Bennett's'. Unless a man is known well enough to be called by his Christian name, he is addressed by his surname and that is all. It is not a sign of discourtesy any more than it is with us. It is only evidence of a totally different temperament.

There are two other ways in which they resemble us more than the French and both are to be regretted. They not merely like good food and drink. On Saturday nights it is quite common to find men drunk. It takes at least four bottles of their wine to bring about this state and their wine (be it noted) is stronger than Bordeaux or Burgundy. They are not ashamed of being drunk either. This was to me an unpleasant discovery, for I had lived among Frenchmen, who frown upon such behaviour. They regard all natural appetites – of food or drink or sex – as given for use but not abuse, and I had never in my life seen a Frenchman drunk, though of course there are a few who do not know how to enjoy a good thing without drinking to excess.

And just as one can see men drunk on Saturday nights in these auberges, as in our 'pubs', so can one hear vulgar and suggestive stories in them. Unfortunately in Britain they are not confined to such places, for even amongst those who claim to be 'cultured' a similar lack of good taste is all too frequent.

This also was a nasty shock, an unpleasant reminder of an unpleasant trait amongst us - so different from the French whom I knew. They would and could discuss anything, showing wit and artistry, but they were never vulgar, never suggestive. I have been at a wedding party, where everyone was gay, and have heard a young married woman get up and sing (amongst other songs) one in which she described in minute detail the experience of sleeping with her husband for the first time - and in the presence of all the men, women, and children at the party. Yet there was nothing whatever in the song that could offend any ear of adult or child, for it had throughout it that precious quality - innocence. Every tiny child bears evidence to the fact that we all come into this world clothed in it. How sad it is that our minds are sullied so soon and that we become so gross that we lose sight of the way by which we 'may be born again and become as a little child'.

Around me in an English village little ones, ere they go to school, peer through my garden gate with angel faces, shyly awaiting an invitation to watch or help tend my plants. When they have been at school for a few years, they will be stealing my fruit, when I am out, and the same is taking

place all over Britain. Better far that there were no schools than that good and the inborn desire for it should be destroyed in human hearts, for all the knowledge in the world will not save a single soul. All are led consciously or otherwise by their dominant love of good or evil to the goal of one or the other, but only an honest searching of the heart will tell us which road we are taking.

I mentioned earlier that the lover of English wild flowers will find all his favourites here. This is so to a most remarkable extent. Just as one sees no villages either in northern or southern France like these, so one finds no similar flora. I have found here every plant that I have found in the southern half of England, which I know best. Some things which are not very common with us, such as the meadow saffron, are quite common here in both riverside meadows and hilly pastures, spicading in places a mauve veil over the autumn grass. The lovely sage, salvia pratensis, with its gentian-blue lips, tound rarely in Kent and Cornwall but a doubtful native of our is to be found in plenty here, as well as in northern France, while the wild chicory, so aptly called in my homeland 'the watcher by the way' from its love of the roadside, hangs up its misty blue flowers all summer and autumn. This seems to me the flower most widely distributed in all France and must surely be the origin of the most popular colour of paint throughout the land - a colour that we describe as French 'grey' for some reason that I do not understand. These verses by the local poet P. Verlhac are just as applicable to May in England as to the Dordogne valley which he was describing:

> Le serpolet sur son rivage Fleurit et tout est embaumé Par le chèvrefeuille sauvage Et l'églentier au mois de mai.

Bercés mollement par la brise, Les blonds peupliers, sveltes et beaux, Se murmurent des galantises Au rhythme doux et lents des flots. As with our poets, the honeysuckle and the eglantine or wild rose are chosen for special mention and May is, as with our poets, the month that has evoked appreciation. In fact one hears 'Mai, mai, le joli mois de mai', so familiar once in our England and in identical words.

Now the glories of spring come much earlier than May in both north and south of France. In the Dordogne valley, however, spring has an English quality. It does not come with a rush. It begins early and tarries long. In February the delicate pink blossoms of peach and apricots, dotted about in gardens but not on walls, decorate bare branches and look so lovely with a general background of old grey stone houses. In March cherries, pear, and plum will change the scene from pink to white. In April the apples will restore the colour but with deeper hue, and at the end of the procession will come the sweetest of all fruit blossom, the quince. Here it is wild, forming quasi-hedges at times by the roadsides. Its conical pink buds and its shell-like pale blooms, growing singly so that each is seen in all its beauty and form, have (as perfect accompaniment) young leaves of silver green, while other fruit trees blossom before their leaves burgeon. Here, as in England, the crop of quinces is always slight in comparison with the blooms. This is something that always puzzles me, for the flowers appear so late that they are not subject to damage by frost.

The woodlands too have an English appearance. All our familiar trees are there. The sweet chestnut raises its crown above the rest of the trees, its golden flowerets glowing in sunshine, while the first hay is being cut. Cherries, lovers of sunshine, establish themselves on the edges of the woods and clothe themselves with snow-white dresses, that show up so beautifully against the dark trees of the forest. There are two kinds of wild cherries, both of edible size — not like our wildling. One of these is known locally as the English cherry and is in fact the semi-transparent kind with slim branches, which we know as the Kentish cherry. This is no doubt an introduction during our occupation, but I do not think that the similarity of vegetation is due to the same cause. Where

climatic conditions are suitable for certain plants, there they are to be found.

One thing, however, is strange to us. The fig seeds itself and can often be seen taking root in clefts of rocks, where nothing else will grow, as well as by roadsides.

Particularly lovely are the poplars by the riverside and in the pasture adjoining it. Some of these are Lombardy but most are balsam with white boles. The tall spires of the latter combine to give an air of both elevation and joy. I do not know why we do not plant it more widely in England. It takes up no room that can be used for other purposes and it makes a really good white wood, far superior to deal, that is useful for countless purposes. It is a doubtful native of Britain, though it has been here for a long time. I suspect that we brought it from Aquitaine during our occupation.

This district offers a perfect illustration of a balanced landscape, and that is responsible for its excellent climatic conditions. In the peasants' desire for a 'little of everything' there is of course ne room for specialization and so there is a proportion of water, woodland, pasture, orchard, and arable. There are enough trees in general to draw moisture and retain it even on the steepest slopes. Thanks too to the woodland, walnuts, poplars, vineyards, and fruit trees, the heat of summer is tempered and there is no sign of scorched earth in the drier years, such as is visible annually only fifty miles farther south.

P. Vidal de la Brache wrote in his Tableau de la géographie de la France: 'In France man has been the disciple of the soil, faithful to its teaching from of old.' How true that is! And none has been more faithful than .hese peasants, to whom I pay my deepest respects in all humility. Would that I had inherited their wisdom!

11. On the making of wine

UP to this time I had kept some semblance of a diary with a certain sequence of events. I had time on my journey to make some notes of what I saw and did. But after the third day of picking grapes, I found myself involved in the life and work of three families. Moreover, word had travelled round that there was such a thing as a stray helper in the district - an unusual thing - and suggestions, not demands, for my services were not scarce. Further, invitations from the families that I had helped - invitations to goûter in the evening or to have a drink of anything at any time - were so obviously sincere that I found not merely plenty for my hands to do but also for my mind to contemplate. There was in fact far more food and drink than my body could digest and more to think about than my brain could digest either. I found myself in another world, a different world from that to which I was accustomed. I needed to adjust my mental attitude as well as my belt!

I fell to the temptation to cat too many good things and found it necessary after a fortnight to take to a diet of water for a few days to correct my intemperance. That restored me to a normal physical state. The mind, however, takes long to adjust itself, to absorb the atmosphere of a different attitude to life, and though the days merged into weeks and the weeks into months, I still felt in some sense a stranger when I returned to England and the management of another dilapidated estate. But I could never forget that experience. Whenever my mind was not fully occupied with pressing work, my thoughts would fly back to the Dordogne valley, as if a magnet were pulling them. I did not resist. I felt no inclination to resist. The many problems that beset us, the many restrictions on our liberty, the lack of any personal conception of the purpose of life or any national aim - none of these things trouble these peasants. They know what they are doing. They know what they want. They are leading a

life that fulfils an end and are creating beauty in every form around them, without any conscious effort on their part to do so. To what extent their inward life corresponds with their external one, I cannot say. There are good, bad, and indifferent folk everywhere, but certainly they are loyal to the land and recognize that they did not create it, that it did not evolve out of nothing and that they cannot make the sun to shine or the rain to fall. They do not rape the earth for personal gain or in the tutile endeavour to feed a pleasure-seeking public with cheap food – as befalls the lot of British farmers.

There is also something amongst these peasants, as indeed in all the countrysides of France, that surkes everyone who comes in contact with them in their homes or work, their little shops or restaurants. One sees literally dozens of women before one encounters a discontented face. Such a pleasant experience and such a complete contrast to the expressions with which we, alas! are all too familiar! Where there are contented comen there cannot be much wrong in the home or anywhere else. Of that I am perfectly certain. The reason for this difference is quite clear to me, but I shall leave it for each to discover it for himself.

Through the passing years the magnetic pull has remained and whenever it has been possible I have returned, and still return. Always there await me not merely a friendly welcome but warm embraces. Always I have the same vivid feeling that I have left an insane world and come back to reality and poetry, faithfully combined in a perfectly normal way.

I find it difficult to decide which season of the year or which kind of work that I have shared has given me most delight. Frosts are not frequent, snow is rare, sunshine is plentiful even in winter and do not leafless trees show their character far more than in summer, when they are, as it were, overdressed? Of course it is lovely to have springs and summers in their seasons — to hear the frogs and nightingales welcome the former and the cicadas the latter, to be able to rely on having real warmth right up to November,

so that everything can be harvested properly, and one is not faced with the problem of storing immature fruit.

Possibly the most interesting (to me) operation are those which concern the making of wine, brandy, and liqueurs. As a number of people in Britain are now considering the idea of making them, some descriptions may prove helpful.

Let me say at once that grapes were grown (and wine made from them) for many centuries in all the southern counties of England, that those required for wine-making can be grown in open ground, preferably as espaliers, that their requirements are a well-drained position, lime applied (if not on limestone soil) and organic manure. Let me add too that wine is the fermented juice of the grape and nothing more. Our so called home-made 'wines' in which sugar or yeast or both are used should be given some other name to avoid confusion.

The method of those peasants who have only a small quantity of wine to make would be applicable to the novice at home. Having only few vines they can leave the grapes to get very ripe before picking, because the more sun the grapes receive, the better will be the wine in both body and alcoholic content. After the grapes are picked, they will be crushed at once to express the juice. They do this in a comporte (any wooden tubs would serve) with a wooden rainmer having a round, flat bottom and a horizontal crossbar at the top. Anyone can make such a thing for himself. Holding this with both hands, one plunges this on to the grapes. In order to crush the juice out in this way, it is advisable to put only a small quantity of grapes in the tub at a time. When crushed, the complete mush is tipped into a barrel and allowed as a rule to ferment for ten days. The actual time depends on the temperature. This is generally described as 'boiling', for that is almost what it appears to do. The barrels have a tap at the bottom, so that the liquid can be drawn off. Before fermentation begins, that is, as soon as all the grapes are crushed, a little juice is drawn off to taste. This is known as vin vierge. This virgin wine is simply a sweet grape juice, as innocent as a baby, devoid of alcohol.

It is a teetotal drink, not prized nor considered of any value to health. When a wineglass of *eau-de-vie* per bottle is added to it, it becomes what is called 'ratafia' – not to be confused with the same name which we apply to the essence made from the oil of almonds.

When the mush has ceased to work, the liquid is put into casks in the cellar. Man has then done his part. It remains for God's own time to do the rest. That is as important as all the human operations. In a materialistic world, where time is reckoned as money and the dignity of honest work is degraded into terms of 'man-hours', this precious thing 'time' is begrudged its gentle influence. Man is unwilling to 'wait upon the Lord' either in his heart or in his daily activities. He seeks a short cut to maturity and likes to deceive himself and the public that his products attain the same quality, because they appear so to the eye. Let me give one or two examples.

When we cut our wheat, there is always a certain amount of moisture in the 'berr,', no matter how good the season has been. When the corn has been in stack for some months, this moisture will have evaporated naturally and slowly, and we shall have perfect corn for milling, provided of course that we have got the wheat in stack in good condition. This moisture can be extracted in a few hours in a drying plant, on analysis the 'berry' will be found to be as dry as (and perhaps drier than) that which has matured in stack, and we are expected to believe that the quality is the same. It is not, and every old miller with a life's experience of his work, knows quite well that it is not. Quality, like life itself, cannot be subjected to analysis, because it is invisible. It cannot be proved. It can only be sensed. There is no difference on analysis between a 'berry' that has been 'killed' in a drying plant and one that has been allowed to grow mellow with age, as I do not suppose that there is any difference, on analysis, between a live and a dead dog. In fact, there is. Is there not?

An oak tree can be felled, cut into planks and dried in a kiln, but the skilled old carpenter or joiner will know at once that he is not handling properly seasoned or really dry wood. An oak must be felled, left for years in 'the round' out of doors and then cut into thick planks, which must be stored for more years under cover with strips between them, so that air can circulate, and then after about fifteen years, oak will be getting seasoned!

It is possible to take a hide, dye it with some chemical and oil it, so that it looks like leather, but the old shoemaker won't be deceived. He will tell at once that he has not the genuine article. The hide must be tanned with oak bark and must be covered with about half an inch of grease and left — left till it has absorbed all the grease. The result will be leather that is really waterproof, and no human cunning can hasten the process.

It is possible to take crude linseed oil, pass it through a separator, as one does with milk; some of its impurities will be thrown off, and it will be sold as refined. But crude linseed oil, left untouched in a vat for three years, will really be refined by precipitation, and a comparison of the two will demonstrate the reason for the poor quality of paint on our markets

I mention these things merely to make it clear that one cannot make wine and expect it to be good to the taste or the body on the following day! Time is absolutely necessary. The length of time varies greatly. A light wine, i.e. light in its body and alcoholic content, not in its colour, matures quickly, just as does a cheese made of skimmed milk. It is palatable in two or three years, at its best in six or seven, and will gradually deteriorate after that. A heavier wine will take proportionately longer, and eau-de-vie, whether it is brandy made from grapes, apricots, plums, or apples, needs a lifetime to lose its 'kick' and become harmless, though it can be used when new in the making of various apéritifs and liqueurs for the purpose of extracting the flavour from fruits and herbs.

And while I am discussing these things, I should like to point out the attitude of mind of the French towards alcoholic drinks in general. They do not drink them for the

sake of the effect obtained by consuming alcohol. André Simon has expressed it so well that I quote his words: 'Although there is bound to be some alcohol in all wines, the importance of alcohol in wine is somewhat like the importance of canvas, board paper, or whatsoever material the artist must have before he can begin to paint a picture: but we do not buy a picture because of the quality, texture, or weight of the canvas or board upon which it is painted: what we look at, appraise, and appreciate is the picture itself, the work of the artist. So it is with wine. The background of ethyl alcohol only serves to bring out and hold together the pleasing colour, attractive fragrance, and delicious taste of the wine itself: these are the real picture, the work of the artist, both a physical and intellectual joy for the connoiss u, that is, he or she who is blessed with a keen and trained sense of appreciation. Alcohol has neither colour, smeli, nor taste of its own, but it holds in the right perspective and shows off the colour, bouquet, and flavour of the wine.'

Another easy way of dealing with the freshly picked grapes is by the use of a crusher. This consists of a couple of rollers, turned by a handle with a box built above them. It looks like a small turnip cutter but has no legs, for it is simply put on top of a comporte. One person holds it in position, another feeds the hopper A small mangle laid across any tub would do a similar job! When the grapes have been crushed, they will be put into an open barrel to 'work' and when that process is finished, the liquid will be drawn off and put in cask. It is then wine. It is only grape juice till fermentation has taken place. Fresh grapes plus the natural process of fermentation produces vin naturel, the best and safest drink in the world for human beings.

Those who have vineyards, and not just a few vines, bring their grapes direct to their cellars and tip them from the comportes at once into a cuve. This is a large, round, straight-sided tub, as much as five feet high and four or more feet across. It will hold, I know not how much. I have not counted the number of comportes that go into it and have never

asked, but the juice that comes from it fills several casks of wine. It stands on blocks about a foot above the ground so that a receptacle can be put underneath the large tap that is provided near the bottom.

The weight of the grapes themselves, which are ripe and tender, is such that there is soon a quantity of juice at the bottom of the *cuve* without any pressure being applied at all. This is that which makes wine of the highest quality, known as the *premier grand cru*.

When this has been drawn off, the time-honoured method of 'treading' the grapes begins. A man gets into the cuve with bare feet and legs and literally treads and treads the grapes till they are completely crushed. This is very hard work indeed. (Anyone who wants a good 'sweat' should try it!) The juice is then drawn off again and the resultant wine is the second cru, but that is not the end of the story. Treading does not express all the juice and recourse is made to a press. That used by these peasants is a most effective apparatus. It consists of a strong sort of straight barrel about three feet high and of about the same diameter. It is of coopered oak, held by very strong bands indeed, with a space of about half an inch between each slat, so that the mush of stalks and skins does not pass through, though the space suffices for the juice to do so. This press is mounted on a miniature lorry body, so to speak, in order that it may be drawn from place to place by a pair of oxen. It has raised edges to prevent the juice from running over the sides. In use it is tilted slightly so that the juice runs to a point where there is a tap, under which a receptacle can be placed. Pressure is exerted by a single long projecting arm that works a plate, revolving on a strong central pole, and fitted with a ratchet. I am not an engineer and cannot give a proper description. I can only say that it exerts a tremendous pressure, especially towards the end of the process when a second man joins the first and reduces the mush to a solid 'cake' that has to be dug out with a fork.

Though many grapes are now pressed by machines on the famous estates, no machine can equal human feet, which

are scrupulously washed of course before operations. These do not squeeze out too much acidity from the skins nor break the grape pips, which give a disagreeable flavour to the wine. Moreover, the mush is acrated better and the ferments mix more thoroughly with the juice. That is only one reason why the small growers produce the best wines.

But that is not the end of the story either - except so far as wine is concerned. This residue, when the press has done its work, is known as marc and becomes the basis of eau-devie. It is boiled in a still, known as an alembic, and as soon . as pressing is finished, the alembic is brought into use. This, like the press, is mounted on a miniature lorry body, so that it can be hauled by oxen from place to place. These stills are to be seen in every village, some of them home-made contraptions (for the principle of distillation is very simple) and some large enough to boil about two bushels of marc at a time. They are set up in shady places, where there is plenty of air, and often have some temporary roof put over them to keep off the sun. The eau-de-vie, as it pours out of the alembic is of course very volatile and anyone could get drunk without even tasting it, merely by smelling the fumes. It would be extremely foolish to sniff the fumes at close quarters, especially at the commencement of operations, for the first spirit that comes is methyl - very suitable as a substitute for petrol but dangerous to human beings.

Each alembic is fitted with a hygrometer, so that one can tell at any time the specific gravity. After reading many, I should say that 55 degress is about the average strength, but, for some reason that I cannot explain, it will drop about five degrees when the spirit has been kept a week or two and then remains stationary.

During the process, the specific gravity gradually goes down and the owner decides when he does not consider that it is strong enough to be worth while continuing. This varies of course with individual tastes.

The residue is then taken out and incorporated with dung on the manure-heap, and that really is the end of the story, told in brief outline. Now these peasants make very good wine – plenty of it – and I am perfectly certain that we could make nice wine in England too. Indeed a quantity of good wine was made in the southern half of the country for several centuries. For the benefit of those who would try their hands at it, let me stress certain things necessary for success.

- 1. The soil must be well drained and if lime is deficient, this must be applied from time to time. Vines grown on limestone soils (in which France is so well supplied) seem to give the best-flavoured wines.
- 2. Vines are greedy feeders and appreciate as much dung, liquid manure, or any organic manure as is available.
- 3 Vines are very hardy and will stand far greater frosts than we ever get in Britain, but grapes need plenty of sunshine, so that they are sweet when gathered.

As sunshine is often lacking, grapes must be left on the vines till very late in the year — even to the end of October in a cold year like 1948. This means covering the individual bunches to protect them from wasps, but more particularly from blue-bottle and green-bottle flies, which will consume the whole crop, if allowed to do so. Or, if a good dry attic is available, the bunches can be cut in September and hung up on strings. As the water-content evaporates, so will they become sweet. We use them, as required, for dessert during the winter months and dry some of them for use as sultanas.

4. All barrels and tubs must be spotlessly clean and sweet. Wine is a very sensitive thing indeed.

Some of it so much so, that it cannot be moved at all and must be consumed on the spot. All of it needs to be treated with something akin to reverence. Being the symbol of truth (as oil is of good) it has infinite qualities. It is true that the great connoisseurs will (blindfolded) give the vineyard and year correctly of (say) twenty well-known wines, but they would be the first to confess that a lifetime is too short a time in which to know all that is to be known about wine. The peasants are well aware of this sensitivity, and (to give one example of this) no woman is ever allowed to enter the cave and draw wine during her monthly periods.

ON THE MAKING OF WINE

Grapes are extremely juicy things and it is surprising a large amount of wine can be made from any given qualitity. The peasants, counting a comporte to contain 65 kilos of grapes, stalks included, reckon to get about 45 littes of wine from it. Put very roughly into English, this means 50 bottles of wine from 150 lb. of grapes.

I should suggest that anyone experimenting should take the couble to be more careful than the peasants by picking the grapes off the stalks – a practice followed by those who like very high quality. Pressing could then be dispensed with and very little waste ensue. He would also get an even better wine if he used only the really ripe grapes, discarding the small ones and unripe ones. These, however, should not be thrown away, for unripe grapes can be used to great advantage it place of lemon, no matter for what purpose lemon is used.

I have mentioned earlier that wine takes ten days to terment. As this depends on the temperature, which is considerably higher than it England at any season, fermentation will no doubt take longer here unless the vat is put, for example, in a greenhouse. Experience in this, as in all things, is the best teacher, but the above few details will suffice for anyone to make a palatable wine and, maybe, a really choice one. Here's a 'health unto His Majesty' and to anyone who aspires to be a vigneron.

The eau-de-vie or brandy which is made, as described by the peasants, for their general use out of the residue of the grapes is not and may not be sold as Cognac or Armagnac. These latter are made not of the residue but by the distillation of the whole grapes and may not be sold as such except by the makers who are registered producers, entitled to use that mark. That does not prevent the peasants from making good brandy, as good as the finest Cognac, and those who have vineyards as well as an auberge or restaurant (always in charge of the wife) can offer their customers une fine, if you know the password. If you don't, ask for a good local eau-de-vie, that may not be sold as Cognac!

I have some bottled in 1905 and made long before the

bottler was born. It is soft as plush on the tongue and has a finer bouquet than any Cognac or Armagnac that I have ever come across.

A recent regulation allows the peasants to make only twenty litres (about twenty-seven bottles) per year for their own use. If they make more than that, the surplus (for sale) is subject to tax. How furious these taxes make them! Why should they pay for the right to sell their own products? Well, I do not think they are paying. By a strange coincidence all seem to have just enough grapes to make twenty litres and no more! The tax-collectors will have to be very cunning to discover the surplus and where it goes. My sympathy is with the peasants: I too object to paying such taxes. If the money collected was wisely spent, one would not object, but any government spends £1,000 to do a job that a private individual would do for a quarter of the amount.

12. Fêtes

EVERY day of the Christian calendar is dedicated to some particular saint and, as with us, every church too. Each French village does honour to its saint on the day dedicated to him or her and so each village has its own annual fête, in which religious observances occupy the morning and rejoicings the latter part of the day. This was, of course, the case with us when England was 'merrie'. The Puritans and other Pharisees that have followed (and the outrageous tax on wine - as wicked as a tax on bread) have done their deadly work in divorcing religion from daily life. These sticklers for Sunciey observances, who claim to be Christian, deny His teaching that 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath'. To them I should like to offer this suggestion: 'Remember to keep holy the week-days and the Sabbath will take care of itself. Happily these peasants have retained the common sense to see that right and wrong are the same on any day of the week and at any time of any day. To them it is meet that their faith should give them a joyful heart on Sundays as well as on week-days. Indeed it is lack of a living religion (regardless of churches or of religious observances of any kind) that has made Britain into such a dull land in which to dwell compared with France.

We often hear it stated that 'the days of miracles are past'. What a terrible indictment of us is the general admission that the statement is true, for it implies that a belief in God is extinct. No wonder therefore that in our land joy has hid her face. Happily this is not so in France. Miracles still happen every year, but the public only hears of those incurables who are recognized as healed of their infirmities by the last people in the world likely to admit the fact – the doctors.

It is because there is still some living belief that most of the French fêtes have a religious basis, in which morning devotions are followed – and surely naturally – by rejoicing. But thankfulness to the Giver of all good things is extended to minor matters. Because, for example, the woods around Carennac have a bounty of lilies of the valley, this village makes holiday when these are in flower. The children go out and gather them, present a bouquet to everyone, so that all have a scented buttonhole, and they wish to each a bon souvenir. The children enjoy picking the flowers, everyone enjoys having them – a mutual delight untarnished by the giving or receiving of money. Neighbouring villages, having no muguets in their woods, have Fêtes des Omelettes instead. In a land of bounty the supply of eggs is at its peak in the spring, as it is elsewhere, when everything that has feathers is 'in lay'. This serves as excuse for holding high festival to give thanks for this superabundance.

Very many villages celebrate the vintage month with fêtes that extend for two and often three days on end, the day (and night) being given up entirely to dancing. This is organized by the young men of the *commune* who have their twentieth birthday that year – and right well do they do it.

The most unusual celebration that I know is that of the Fête des Cornes at Domme, a fortified village perched on top of a conical hill, up which three roads wind to old gateways. The 'festival of horns' is clearly of pre-Christian origin. It lives because it has in it certain eternal values, preserved in humorous form. Doubtless it was held at first on some fixed date (I should suggest that it has connexion with the zodiacal sign of Taurus) but it has long been celebrated on Ash Wednesday; which shows its acceptance in the Christian calendar.

On that morning there are sudden blasts from horns, not in harmony or any attempt at it! It sounds like a number of bullocks at play. This is the signal for those who were married in the preceding year — the period between the Carnival of Horns — to assemble, disguised and masked, on the Place de la Rode. The last of those who were married in that year carries a hayfork decorated in the following way: slipped over the points of the fork, one over each, are two

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ox borns, the largest that can be found. Sprays of ivy and laurel are wound round the lower part of the prongs and the handle of the fork as well and tied with golden ribbons. It may represent a trophy of some old image dedicated to the great Pan or other rural divinity.

When the inhabitants have all collected, the troop of masqueraders betake themselves, with musical instruments leading, to the house of the first man married during the preceding carnival year. They arrange themselves in front of his house and give him a morning serenade of sorts! When the music stops, the oldest married masquerader steps forth and calls out three times le sassiré; that is, the surname of the owner. There is no monseur, no politesse in the address. He is not reticent to hear. He knows that everyone is outside and that may show of objection or resistance would 'add fuel to the fire' of atmisement and exuberance and that enough of that is to follow anyway. So he comes out on to the steps at his front door and the music greets him with fury!

When that stops again, the man steps forward, teased on all sides and conducted by the master of the ceremonies. Firstly, he is made to curtsy very humbly to the decorated hayfork, which is held in the centre of the circle. It his bow does not satisfy the audience, he has to repeat it till it does! After that he is made to kneel on a large rough stone, where he is asked a number of farcical questions put in similar form to a catechism at marriage. When he has answered as best he can these impudent, ludicrous, and (I may say) embarrassing queries as to his relations with his wife during his first year of marriage, he is made to recite word for word a profession of faith! In this he promises to be deaf and blind and die of laughter! And to finish, he has to swear on the sacred horns that he will never believe that 'it is, even if he should see it'! What 'it' is, is left to the imagination.

When he has made this avowal, the great garlanded horns are made to do obcisance to him and indeed are laid across his head for a moment; and he has to embrace them. Then the master of the ceremonies pronounces in a burlesque

formula that the wretched victim has now been received into the illustrious fellowship! He is then honoured, dubbed like a knight, and the music acclaims him in no uncertain manner.

During these proceedings the man's wife watches from the background, laughing or blushing according to the nature of the questions and answers.

When this farce is finished, the novice takes the hayfork and leads the procession to the second man married in the preceding year, and the fun begins again and is repeated till all the men married during that period have been visited and afflicted! The last to be dubbed then takes the horned beast to the inn, where the 'illustrious brotherhood' finds a wonderful lunch awaiting them. Eating, drinking, and laughter goes on for hours.

Not content with that farce, the people of Domme have another ceremony for husbands. They have a plaster image representing a poor man who gets beaten by his wite. They dress it up in a gown with headgear and neckerchief, put a distaff at one side and mount it on a donkey, or un Pom-Pom, as it is generally called, with its head facing the donkey's tail. Then the masqueraders escort it to every part of the little old town, jesting and jeering at it all the time, as though it were alive, and singing as they go an old song in patois:

Adiou paouré Carnabal Tu t'en bas et yo demori Per mintza lo soup'o l'oli!

So poor old King Carnival has to die – till his resurrection in the following year, when les enfants de Domme will again behave like children and have another rollicking day at no expense whatever to anyone. In fact they provide a wholeday entertainment free of charge to native or stranger. How much Shakespeare would have enjoyed it! Perhaps his spirit infuses some of the revellers.

The chief cereal grown by the peasants is wheat. Its harvest takes place in July and as the harvests of many other

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crops are to follow, there is no special celebration of that except in the homes. When the wheat has all been cut, there is a particularly nice supper, at which chicken à la cocotte with salsify is the pièce de résistance, accompanied with plenty of wine to make good, so the peasants say, the harm to their bodies that has been done by drinking water during harvest. To make good the loss by sweating in the hot sun, they aegually do drink some water, for it is really hot in July, and it is the only time at which I have ever known water to be drunk - except by animals. The wine drunk at this supper is a petit vin and as a rule a sparkling one, which they make expressly for the occasion. It is difficult to imagine that the water could be harmful, for really lovely springs of it are abundant and I am sure that many of them are of high medicinal value and would be exploited, if the inhabitants had commercial ideas of making money.

It is during the vintage month, i.e. from the middle of September to the middle of October, that thanksgiving for the many bounties of the carth takes place. Many a village makes festival not for a day but for two or three or even four days on end, each one beginning with some religious ceremony and ending with all-night dancing.

There is one in particular that I like to attend because (I must admit) I can consume a wonderful wine, like which there is nothing to be found on earth. This is at a little village with the curious name of Queyssac. It is high up on a flat hill, from which one seems able to survey the whole world. It is reached by a very poor road from Bétaille, which is on the hard road between Vayrac and Puybrun, but it is worth while to make the ascent, both for the sake of the view and the wine. Furthermore, those who would like to see 'truffle' oaks can see them on either side of the road. when one has climbed part of the way. They can be recognized by their stunted appearance and by the fact that they are planted at equal distances of ten metres apart with seldom more than a couple of rows in any one place. In this parish of Queyssac and in part of the adjoining one of Sioniac, a vin paillé, as it is called, is made both of red and

white grapes. 'Strawed' wine (to translate literally) has its name because the grapes are allowed to hang very long before they are gathered and even then they are not crushed at once in the usual way. They are laid out on straw in a grenier or attic, with which every farmhouse is well supplied, and are allowed to remain there till December or even January. This reduces the water and increases the sugar content. The grapes, in fact, are half-way to becoming raisins before they are pressed. The result is an indescribable wine, for I know of nothing with which to compare it. It is aromatic, sweet and yet has at the same time a certain piquancy. I took with me once a French commercial traveller who claimed to have drunk every wine made in France and did not believe that anything untried by him (and worth drinking) existed. He changed his mind after this visit and stocked his car with as many bottles as he had money to pay for!

Though this is, as one would guess, a far heavier wine than any made in the usual way and improves with keeping, it has the merit of being an exceedingly pleasant as well as entertaining beverage even in the year following its birth. It is made to perfection only by three or four vignerons and is not obtainable even at auberges and restaurants in the neighbourhood. I happen to know one of these makers, but anyone who wishes to try it must go to Queyssac itself, where it is stocked by its two 'hotels'. Try a small glass of 1947, then a 1946, then a 1945 and so on - with a biscuit and a look at the lovely view between each - and continue -.with an interval for lunch - so long as there is enjoyment without abuse. It will be a day well spent for a countryman who can share his hours with simple folk, whose teacher has been the land and whose language is mostly of the earth. One should go in the spirit of a pèlerin. To me at any rate it is a sort of pilgrimage, 'far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife'. As regards price, this wine commands the highest of any vintage in the district - even higher than premier grand crue Monbazillac, which to local taste (and to mine for that matter) is superior to the world-famous ChâtFÊTES 151

eau Yquem. That should suffice to induce anyone to undertake the journey, if he is interested in wine-tasting.

With the arrival of November and All Saints' Day, it has become too cool to end the celebrations of that festival by dancing out of doors at night, though one has sweated in summer clothes during the midday hours in loading light but superb attermath hay - regain, as it is termed. In the evening, therefore, domestic fêtes, so to speak, are held at individual farms and in some auberges. Those who cooperate. in picking their grapes, cooperate too in the déplissage of corn cobs and in the shelling of walnuts (énoisement), taking it in turns to visit one another's homes, and they celebrate the evening of All Saints with a domestic fête des marrons. The sweet chestnuts have been falling then for a week or so, so why not give thanks for this bounty in some way or other? There are enough and to spare growing wild in the woods for tar more people and wild boars than there are to eat them and far more than all their pigs can manage either.

Clélie, of course, has one of those inns where this old custom is maintained in all its simple pleasantry, and I decided to spend the evening there once with Arthur Tavern, a youngster full of fun, with whose uncle I stayed for les vendanges near Vitrac, in years gone by. He was grown up now, had lost none of his harmless sense of mischief and had it, in fact, in the form of a little square box, covered with a cloth, so that no one could have the slightest idea of its contents. He would in fact neither show them nor divulge them to me, but he did tell me that by means of its contents he could tell whether the kernel inside a walnut was good or bad without cracking it – a thing that no one would believe. He suggested that, as part of the evening's fun, he was willing to give a demonstration.

We went straight into the kitchen in the usual way and I introduced Arthur to the company that had already arrived. This kitchen was just like any old farmhouse out here or in England. The great open fireplace was backed by a large iron plate with the figure of Napoleon in the centre, surmounted by an eagle and flanked by curtains. In

the inglenook both seats were occupied by couples. From the rack hook a huge cauldron, of exactly the same shape as an old English one, hung over large blazing logs. Steam was jetting out of the cauldron, which was full of chestnuts.

The logs rested on two very heavy dogs, the tops of which had been worked by the smith into flat round cups. In each of these cups was a glass of red wine, glowing from the light of the fire. On the mantelpiece was a pair of brass candlesticks and, as usual, a various assortment of tin boxes for pepper and other condiments. All the chairs and the two tables were being used as seats, as was the lower part of a large walnut cheffonier. On top of this, as in every kitchen in the district, were two copper pots, waisted, round, capable of holding about two gallons. They had dented bottoms, for they were till recently used by all for carrying water on the head. In the dent a cloth was put, so that the loaded vessel did not hurt one's head. A couple of buckets have now replaced these beautiful pots, which are, however, treasured as family heirlooms. Of course buckets are more practical, but the carrying of water or other things on the head is more than picturesque. It does more too than merely give a perfect deportment. It keeps the body and its organs in perfect poise. Our Victorian ancestors knew well enough the danger of chairs and their tendency to make one 'floppy', hence their insistence on a stiff, upright position on a chair. It has taken soft arm-chairs and the driving of cars and tractors to teach us that these sort of things provide us with colitis and other internal troubles in seducing us with comfort. The most natural positions are, of course, standing and lying down. The Orient in its wisdom has not forgotten. ... But I do like my Windsor chair with its arm supports, just where they should be, and a nice plump cushion on it! I blame my car, not it, for my colitis but should, of course, blame myself.

The dining-room was full of people. The small tables had all been pushed back against the walls, so that the centre of the room was free. Golden corn-cobs hung in bunches from every beam of the ceiling, looking like racemes of laburnum FÊTES 153

but deeper in colour. In a corner a combustion-stove, burning wood, warmed the whole room. The prospect of a happy evening warmed every heart and a shout went up when Clélie and her helper came in, carrying between them a typical English clothes basket, made of peeled willow wands, glistening white, for it was quite new. In the bottom of the basket was a folded blanket. On this the boiled chestnuts had been put and covered with a sheet. On this more cloth was put and finally a large pillow.

Clélie placed the basket in the centre of the room and announced that it contained a clutch of eggs. She would like someone to sit on them and hatch them for her! Who would volunteer? The answer was laughter, screams, and scramble - quite indescribable. Every young man rushed for any girl that took his fancy, while she tried or pretended to try (ça dépend) to elude him. One young man trying to make a girl into a brooding hen on a basket would be amusing enough, but when a number of them are trying to do the same ar 1 cuch is trying to get his girl there first, it makes the whote thing into a kind of joyous Rugby scrum, in which pushing with hands and arms does not break the rules. I laughed till my sides became so painful that I had to go out and give them a rest. When I went in, success was on the point of being achieved. A sturdy young man with his girl in his arms and with her feet off the ground, so that there was no resistance from that end of her, shoved his head and hers through various legs and succeeded in dumping her on the pillow, not in the approved sitting pose desirable for brooding purposes, but flat on her back. Taking advantage of her helpless state, helpless with laughter as well as from her position, he signalled his triumph by pulling her skirt over her head, disclosing her legs and lingerie to perfection and exclaiming: 'Voici' Could a brooding hen have better legs? Would she not be able to brood her chicks well?'

I ought to explain that the girl who becomes the brooding hen is supposed to be married before these celebrations take place in the following year, hence the competition and the pseudo-resistance. Similar jollity goes on in peasants' homes, where neighbours and relatives have collected. There is this difference that in the homes each guest brings samples of his own wines, the whole company shares, criticizes, and judges them.

The chestnuts fortunately did not take three weeks, like hens' eggs, to hatch, and Clélie was soon passing them all round - free to all - while we all ordered the drinks that we fancied. Talk and laughter were incessant and I gave up waiting for an opportunity for Arthur to perform his act. I mounted a chair, demanded silence and told the company that my friend had a remarkable and unusual gift, i.e. he could tell a good walnut from a bad one without cracking it. No one believed it, of course. Arthur promised to pay for drinks all round it he was wrong in any one case out of a dozen walnuts, but stipulated that the company should pay for a bottle of old Cahors if he was right. He pointed out that he could not do it in their presence, because the 'atmosphere' of many people upset his magnetism! With the bargain struck, Clélie produced a dozen walnuts, Arthur took them out - to his magic box - returned in a few minutes to say that all were good except the one that he held in his hand. Before cracking them, we examined them very carefully indeed to see that he had not prised them slightly open at the joint with a sharp knife. Having satisfied ourselves on this point, they were tapped with the usual little wooden maillet - and Arthur was right! Quelle surprise! What wide wondering eyes there were! What puzzled expressions! Was it really possible? No, the general conclusion was that it was a lucky guess and the bargain was struck again after a long and lively bout of chatter, during which a young man in the company had disappeared. He returned with twenty walnuts and told Arthur that he would be a believer if Arthur was correct with them all. Arthur agreed but remarked that it would take him longer to 'sense' twenty than twelve - a statement that seemed perfectly reasonable. When Arthur went out with them, the young man confided in the company that the walnuts were some that he had knocked down early, forgotten to eat, and that most, if

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not all, of them would be bad! That would catch him, he said - and there was general assent that it would.

Arthur was longer and when he came back, he put down two walnuts that he pronounced good, told us that the other eighteen were bad – and he proved to be right again.

He got his two bottles of old Cahors, ordered clean glasses all round and asked us to toast 'the spirit' that enabled him to accomplish this detection, but when we raised our glasses, Arthur, who had preserved a serious mien about his performances up to this moment, burst into fits of laughter, that silenced the whole company.

More surprise, more wide eyes, more wondering, till it dawned on them all that there was a trick in it somewhere.

Here I felt entitled to say that I knew it was done by means of a utile magic box and invited Arthur to bring it in. He fetched it, stood in the centre of the room and very slowly took off the cloth, while the whole company squashed him like a sardine in their eagerness to see - what? A small, square box with a door on one side (made mostly of wirenetting) and inside 'the spirit' - a tame squirrel!

As thunderclaps echo across this valley from hill to hill in summer storms, so did their peals of laughter. The room was too small to contain their outburst. They rushed out into the street and roared with delight at being fooled so well and then spread the joke through the whole village by linking arms and singing their way down every street, as they do at their wedding evenings, stopping here and there to announce the latest news!

Arthur's secret needs no explanation to a countryman. For the benefit of others, I should mention that a squirrel does not need to crack a nut to see if it is good or not. It knows without doing so. Arthur only had to present his walnuts to his squirrel, which (rewarded like the truffle-hunting sow) was will'ng at all times to perform its little miracle on behalf of its master.

13. A Good Day's Work

Down the village street came the rumble of a cart, accompanied by a sound that has not been heard in Britain for many years. The sound was as if several people, walking noiselessly, were tapping the road with metal-shod walkingsticks. It was in fact an ox-cart, very small in every way when judged by our standards but eminently suitable for the little farms and narrow streets of the villages overlooking the river Dordogne. These carts are made by local craftsmen of local material for local needs and in consequence they serve their purpose admirably. It is our modern implements, designed theoretically by some engineering draughtsman (who has never had any experience of farming) that prove ineffective. Such implements are expected to meet any farmer's need. Unfortunately land cannot be standardized. No two farms are alike, and implements must be made (as indeed they were made in Britain before the industrial revolution) for the particular conditions in which they are to be used.

The little metallic taps were the sound of the oxen's shoes. The cloven hoof makes it impossible to have one shoe on each foot, as with a horse, and so each half has a little shoe about 41 inches long, almost oval in shape but with one side (the inner side of the hoof) straight. Each shoe is held by six nails. These can only be driven into the outside part of the hoof, so that it is necessary to have a metal strap, which is part of the shoe, bent over from the inside to the outside. The shoe looks, in fact, like a small child's sandal (in metal) with a strap across the toes but no strap at the back. To ensure comfort for the ox and perfect fitting, these shocs are not flat but slightly concave inside (and convex outside) to conform to the shape of the hoof. To look at, it is an extremely simple and (to my eyes) beautiful little thing. I am sure the blacksmith must be just as good a craftsman as a bootmaker in order to make such shoes so

that they really do fit and are not, like our factory-made boots, just 'near enough'.

With the ox-team I recognized from a distance the unmistakable gait of Gustou - the roll of a drunken sailor. Not that he was drunk or a sailor, but he had what I can only describe as a drunken mentality, which accounted (I suppose) for his customary way of walking. Anyone who did net know him and did not speak his patois or understand it, would certainly conclude as I did, when I first met him, that he was intoxicated. He was not merely unsteady on his feet and dishevelled as to his clothes (his beret, for example, always appearing to be in the act of falling off from some part or other of his head) but his speech seemed also to indicate an intemperate state. He worked for anyone and everyone in the village and surrounding holdings, tending their vines or taking part in any of the jobs that occupy the time, thoughts, and affections of tillers of the soil. He had no regular employer, for no one was willing to employ him except as a last · source, for a fictitious drunkard does not get through more work in a day than a real one. Fortunately for him someone or other was nearly always needing some help and so he was generally occupied - certainly quite as much as suited him.

There was a certain sweet childishness about him which precluded him from having any sense of time or any appreciation of urgency. Life flowed through him and around him like the river, which was visible from most of the fields and vineyards where his days were spent. He could not hurry his words or actions, for his mind knew not the meaning of that word. I remember one summer day, when he had been sent by a farmer's widow to fetch (with her oxteam) a load of hay from a small farm on the Puy d'Issolud eight miles away. He had not returned when expected. As I was driving in that dir ction in the afternoon, I offered to take the widow with me. Knowing the ways of Gustou, she did not anticipate any accident, but I don't think that she was prepared to see what we found.

We imagined that we should meet him on his way home,

but when we arrived at the farm, there was the ox-team grazing unattended near the farm buildings. The cart was not even loaded. We shouted several times, as we walked about the place, but there was no reply and no sign of Gustou. The house was unoccupied, for the land was let to a tenant near by who had his own house. A round table, a few chairs, and cooking utensils were kept there, so that when work had to be done on the fields, a meal could be cooked at midday and eaten comfortably. We entered the house. It was not locked, for thieves do not wander about countrysides where there are only peasant farms. In the spacious living-room the solid rough table, placed in front of the window, was beaming with sunshine. On it was part of a home-made loaf, an empty plate, a knife, and a bottle of vin ordinaire, partly consumed. At the table facing the window was Gustou with his arms on the table, his head on his arms, fast asleep. His work for the day had so far been to drive to the farm, cook a meal, and go to sleep!

Uncertain as to whether he was ill or not, I put my hand on his shoulder and gently pushed him sideways. He woke - gradually, for even that was a slow process with him. He looked first at me, then at the widow, and smiled with the drunken twinkle with which he said his 'Bon jour'. He showed not the smallest sign of remorse or regret or even of surprise at seeing us - a fact which endeared him to me more than before. A man, considered normal, when caught by his employer in such a situation, would have jumped up and pretended something or other, would have had some excuse ready to his tongue. Not so Gustou. His childish conscience gave him no uneasiness. He would have no idea whether it was one or five o'clock in the afternoon, whether he had slept four minutes or hours. As to waste of time since he knew no time, he could not waste it! One cannot use or abuse that which one has not got!

The widow looked sternly at Gustou and proceeded to say what she thought of his conduct. To make sure that he understood she reverted to their native tongue, the language used by the peasants amongst themselves. I say tongue (not

patois, as most would say) for it really is a language, being in fact Latin. At least it is mostly Latin, for the priests, who in their training learn to speak Latin, can understand these peasants. The termination of words have changed through the ages. For example, a hand is now manoc instead of manus, but the whole basis remains substantially the same. This is not surprising, seeing that the Pomans were in occuparion for so long in the delectable valley of the Dordogne and its surroundings. A map of that valley, between Lalinde and Bretenoux, will show that the name of practically every village and farm ends with -ac. These names, wherever found, are the surest evidence of Roman occupation, for the termination -ac is simply the shortened form of -acum, the Latin genitive plural. The occupation lasted indeed so long that the Romans became the local population, just as later did the Norman-English who coming here in A.D. 1150 (when Aquitaine was joined with the English crown) stayed for 300 years and left their mark as much as the Romans and far more visibly.

Thoughts about these things passed through my mind, while I listened to the widow's diatribe, which seemed to me unnecessarily long - perhaps because I could not understand it. I watched the faces of the one and the other and found it difficult to restrain my laughter Gustou looked at the widow all the time with that benevolent and detached smile of one who has had just enough wine to make him feel well disposed to all the world. As his normal state was very much like that, it only needed a glass or two of the petit vin of the countryside to complete the appearance of drunkenness. Obviously far removed from wishing to give offence, he was equally far removed from receiving it. Water flows off a duck's back but one cannot even pour insult on one who is not open to receive any . . . and, of course, Gustou was used to similar talks from all those who employed him.

When it was over, Gustou went out and we followed soon to help him put up his little load. As the door closed behind him, the widow's face took on a very generous smile, as she said to me, 'Que voulez-vous? One must try to appear stern and angry with Gustou, when he has failed in his duty, but it is very difficult.'

'Yes,' I agreed. 'He is more child than man.'

'Bien sûr,' she replied. 'We others, so the good Lord said, have to be born again and become as little children, innocent of evil. Gustou, it would seem, dwells more in heaven than in this world. Yet all condemn him as a lazy drunkard. My heart loves him.'

'Mine too,' I replied, as we went out to join him.

Having helped him to load the cart, we sent him on his way, while we visited two farmers that we wanted to see. As is usual in this district, where the production of food and drink and the pleasure in its consumption is the main occupation, we were constrained to goûter something. This suits me, for I am never averse to tasting anything produced in a countryside, more especially in France, where such an abundance of good things is to be found. In this case a large stone jar was fetched and out of this with an old silver spoon were ladled greengages in eau-de-vie. The greengages had been dried on straw mats in the sun, after being picked when quite ripe, and had spent some years steeped in brandy made of greengages. I wondered what such a drink would cost in London or New York, if it could be bought, yet to these peasants it was no more than if a Devonshire farmer had drawn a mug of cider from his cask. Truly what is common in one place can be worth its weight of gold in another. Yet there is no reason why we in England should not make our own liqueurs and spirits. We can grow peaches, apricots, and greengages in the open, like bush apples, in the southern half of England at any rate. We can indeed grow a very great variety of fruit in Britain. There is no mystery in the making of spirits and liqueurs. One only needs a still to make eau-de-vie from the pulp of any fruit, sound or fallen. A still is such a simple thing that any plumber - or even handyman - can make it. Of course one of the restrictions on our supposed freedom prevents us from doing so, but a small tax could be imposed (as in France) and we should then no longer have the scandal of waste that occurs whenever there is a bountiful harvest of plums, for example Nor should we have to send money out of the country to import nearly all liqueurs and other good drinks that we import.

Just as one sees the travelling cider-press hauled from one small farm to another in our western counties (for only the larger farms have presses of their own) so in France during the autumn months one sees the travelling still going its rounds, distilling spirit from the residue left by the ciderpresses and wine-presses. What a saver of waste this simple contraption can be! During the war, when the vast surplus of greengages in Dordogne valley and hill-side villages could not be cont away, this was converted into prunelle. This brandy, when made of ordinary plums, is of the very finest, as everyone knows, but when it is made of greengages, it is something to be drunk with praise and prayer. At least, that is how a peasant described it, while we sipped some, made by his great grandfather, as we sat one evening in the warm spring sunshine of an April day, watching the brownish-purple shoots of a giant walnut unfold and the delicate pale pink blooms of a quince, surely the loveliest of all fruit blossoms, bob gently up and down on the cradle of a breeze. Under such conditions a beverage seems to become a benediction.

On another occasion, when I was returning to England for a while, a jar was slipped into my pocket for use at Noël, which was approaching. This was from the farmer's widow, of whom I have been speaking above. When I opened it, it was found to be trout with truffles in mayonnaise: the trout caught in the river by her son, the truffles from her own woods, the mayonnaise made with virgin walnut-oil from her own walnuts, pressed at a local watermill. What délicatesse! What delicious fare beyond all description, for if there is anything nicer than trout in the way of fish, I don't know of it. If there is any oil (except olive) that can compare with walnut, I have never tasted it and if there is any fungus that can be classed with truffles, it must be on some other

earth than ours. Here were all three combined and available to any peasant in the district. Yet the ignorant pity the poor peasant for his dog's life, his incessant drudgery. Strange as it may seem, it is just they who, not being slaves to machines, have the leisure to stop and talk, to fish daily if they choose, to shoot (whenever a few of them care to join) over the whole parish, ignoring all game laws, if these happen to be inconvenient. There are, it is true, certain selfish owners who choose to keep their own shooting to themselves and so one comes across notices occasionally stating chasse gardé. Such owners do not merit and do not have a good name. The rest of the community cooperate gladly, no matter how many or few arpents of land is owned by each.

In England we farmers are compelled by circumstances to use all manner of machines, whether we like them or not, but we never have time to do nearly all the jobs required, and not only are there more weeds in one field on a firstclass farm of ours than in a whole French parish, but the amount of trees, crops, and livestock of our richest land, like the Fens, is only a tithe of the amount that these peasants produce from any given area. The reason is that each family is able to cultivate properly the amount of land that they have. Ownership of land and not the mechanization of it is the secret of production. The man who owns land will learn to treat it as it should be treated. He does not take from it its natural fertility, its humus, without returning its wastes and manure, for he can see that his standard of living would go down if he did. He would not replace his oxen with a tractor, for the latter gives no dung, but he is not averse to having a tractor as well as his oxen, if he can afford it and the size of his farm justifies it. In fact on the larger farms, especially in the northern part of France, I have seen a great increase of tractors in the past twenty years. But, wherever machines are introduced on farms, in no matter what country, the pleasures of farming are decreased, for the tempo of life is quickened. Afraid to waste the time of these expensive implements, we surrender some liberty. We have 'no time to stand and stare', as Will Davier, the tramp poet,

put it. When I look upon these little farms of the Dordogne valley and compare them with our own acres, I feel ashamed. deeply ashamed of the small amount that we obtain per 100 acres compared with the variety and abundance of these peasant holdings. Yet we deride them as being hundreds of years behind the times. It would almost seem that we in Britain have come to esteem a farmer mainly by the amount of machines that he uses, and not (as in my youth) by the headlands and corners. When we used horses, every square yard had to be ploughed and the small piece in every corner, which literally could not be ploughed, was dug by hand. The tractor is terrified of tree roots near a hedge and gives it a wide berth, while the corners . . . well, it just describes an arc somewhere near them, and every pernicious weed has the freedom to se d and multiply. But the tractor does not mind, and apparently the owners of mactors do not mind either. Costs are more important than production per acre. What does not pay 500 to the wind and man's pilde in a job well done goes with it. Worse still, with that goes the very delight of husbandry, which is replaced by commercial farming, an open-air version of a factory, as nearly as man can make it.

But my shame extends to more than the mere practice of farming, for is not their very life a far saner thing than ours? They are not seeking to make money with which to obtain purchased pleasure in some form or other. They are just taking their pleasure and their leisure in their daily work. The machinations of Mammon cannot easily get them in its net, for how can one rope in those who produce what they need and a surplus to boot?

Such comparisons occurred to me, as they do so often, while we enjoyed the greengages in eau-de-vie and discussed the progress of the spring sowings and the prospect of fruit for the year. When we set out for home (having wasted or spent – whichever you will – about two hours) after Gustou on his eight-mile return journey, we wondered where we should overtake him. We did not have to wonder long. At the first farm, about 600 yards from his starting-

point, we saw his loaded cart – at rest. So was Gustou – sitting with the farmer in the evening sun, a family of ducklings squatting on one side of them, a dog asleep at their feet, a turkey cock standing at attention and a quince tree covered with its porcelain-like pink flowers as a background. The setting sun was enhancing, as it always does, all the colours of this homely scene. It was a lovely picture indeed, too lovely to spoil by a harsh word or for that matter even by any feeling of annoyance.

What could one do? What could one say? The widow looked at me and we shared a smile and, I think, very similar feelings. We both smiled at Gustou and the farmer and with a cheery 'Bon soir' drove on. There seemed no point in stopping. We preferred to have dinner at dinner time or thereabouts.

Before turning in for the night I strolled round to see if the traveller had returned. He had not. Some time or other, however, in the hours of darkness (he would not know when) he must have arrived. When I passed the stables about eight o'clock on the following morning, I peeped in, saw the oxen in their stalls munching their fodder and Gustou on the strawed floor beside them fast asleep. I did not disturb him. Bless his heart!

This was no unusual sleeping-place for him, especially during the warmer months. If his services were no more reliable than those of a child, his wages matched them. They were mostly in kind. He got food and wine and shelter wherever he worked, and that was about all he was worth or got or expected. Nor was he exacting in his demands about even these.

A week or two after this little journey to the Puy D'Issolud I was sitting outside of the Cheval Blanc (White Horse Inns are as common in France as in England). I had been early afield. A little rest and a drink seemed desirable and what better than a café au rhum? To my taste rum is a sickly thing, but with coffee I can enjoy it. A little stimulant after exercise just meets a morning need and mood. It was not my own idea. I noticed that the facteur on this round deliv-

ering letters and passing peasants often stopped for this as a fairly early morning beverage. The French have a flair for the right drink at the right time.

As I sat there, I watched the sunshine pour on and through the tender golden young leaves (just unfolding) of the vine trained right along the front of the wall above me. Opposite me and across the road stood a fine walnut, of which there are vast quantities in the district. The sun lit up its silver bole with its patches of orange lichen and deep green moss and purple-brown shoots — a beautiful thing indeed. Its green catkins, as long and as thick as a man's fingers, were falling on the ground, where they looked like large caterpillars. One almost expected them to crawl away, so real did they rook from where I sat.

It was just then that Gustou came down the street with a pair of oxen and the usual cart. The oxen have no harness of any kind, and work always in pairs. As the oxen have no harness, so the carts he e no shafts. These and all implements have a central pole instead, with a hole in it at the end. In the wooden yoke, midway between the oxen is a hole too. An iron pin is passed through this and through the hole in the pole . . . and the oxen are yoked, ready for work in a few seconds. No harness, no maintenance costs, no waste of time. What a saving all round! When the weather is warm, flies can be a nuisance. Oxen then have their faces veiled with coarse brown nets, which give them protection from this annoyance and do not impede their vision in any way. The veils extend from horns to muzzles.

Ox-teams are generally bred and trained in districts that are suited especially for stock-rearing, such as the Limousin, and are sold to those who work the great arable farms of northern France and to smallholders. They are, as a rule, bought when three years old, worked for three years and then sold to the butcher at about their original cost. Their owner therefore has three years' work and three years' dung from each animal at practically no cost, as it were. Some of the holdings in the Dordogne valley are too small to keep an ox-team fully occupied and a cow, so it is fairly common

to see cow-teams instead. Of course cows that work do not give nearly so much milk as those used solely for the dairy, but they suffice to give enough for the family needs in milk, butter, and cheese. To make sure of not being short of these, such farmers keep a goat or two as well.

Those who imagine that oxen have to be goaded will be surprised to hear that they are not driven at all under any circumstances. The owner walks in front and the oxen follow, whether they are drawing cart, plough, or any other implement. They are so well trained and tractable that they follow exactly the line that the owner takes, whether straight or curved. To the ordinary observer there may appear nothing unusual about this, but to me (who have farmed all my adult life) it is a constant source of admiration. With the owner walking in front I wondered, when I first saw oxen at work, how they were induced to turn at right angles as when mowing a field or turn right about as when ploughing. The answer is as follows. Over his shoulder the owner carries an aiguillon, which in spite of its name is not a goad and has no point. It is a light wooden wand of any length from eight to twelve feet. When the owner wishes his oxen to make any special manoeuvre, he turns round (facing them) just touches very lightly the outside flank of one or the other and they will turn as much or as little as is required. If for example the ox on the off side is touched on the off flank, the team will turn in the opposite direction, i.e. to the left. And if the ox on the near side is tapped on the near side, the team will turn right. It is unnecessary to touch both, for the oven are so much accustomed to one another that they act as a unit, having but one mind, as it were. They do everything in perfect unison. I have seen many a team that does not have to be touched at all. The owner just passes his wand towards one side or other, the team observes and obeys instantly. It is really a pleasure (to me, at least) to see these well-trained teams. There is never any fuss, any impatience or shouting on the part of the owner, and no sign of a rebel spirit on the part of his team. They move forward to a long-drawn 'Ah!' and they halt to the universal 'Whoa!' And when they stop, they will stand still indefinitely without being tied. The aiguillon will be placed with one end on the ground and rested on the yoke between the oxen, with the other end pointing skywards between their heads. Both oxen see it and accept it, I suppose, as a symbol of their master's presence.

Oxen are proverbially examples of patience, but they are more than that. In them there seems to be embodied the wisdom of the ages. In their gentle eyes is the peace, the sweet content, as it were, of a sage who has weathered the storms, mental and physical, of this our world and found heaven ere he quitted it for another. Just to sit and watch them provides a lesson for all, who will, to learn. They are a sort of Sermon on the Mount, not spoken, but presented in living form, a visible image of everlasting values.

So oxen have stood throughout the centuries of written history, their quiet eyes seeming to view eternity. So they stand today. So will they stand in ages to come, when this mechanical era has complitted suicide, been forgotten, lost without trace; for (unlike all previous civilizations) it will leave nothing of permanence to indicate that it has ever been.

When I first saw oxen long years ago, I had the impression, which everyone gets, that they are very slow. Their stride is longer than it looks and their pace is very deceptive in consequence. As a matter of fact a good pair of oxen will plough as much and as well as a good team of horses. It all depends on the man or woman who is with them, as it does with horses. A lazy man will soon have a team of either that creeps like himself. It is true that in the south where the sun has more power, man and beast travel more leisurely. No one can hustle for long in a high temperature. Indeed climate dictates to a considerable extent the tempo of life on the land, the rhythm and pace at which to work without strain. The machine ignores this and man suffers from its use. Commercial farming ignores this, for to it the making of money is the primary object. The making or unmaking of man does not enter into account.

But to return to Gustou. He came rolling down the street,

tacking a bit from side to side, his aiguillon over his shoulder, his beret over his left eye. His tread was noiseless. He was wearing pantoufles with rope soles and canvas uppers, as most people do there except when the ground is wet. We wear them at the seaside and (for some unaccountable reason) nowhere else. He followed the local practice of wearing no socks, another economy that we do not see on our farms, even when we do get dry weather in summer. It was not warm enough for him to dispense with a shirt, as many do in the warm weather, when it is quite common to see men in the fields wearing only hat, shorts, and pantoufles. I have even seen whole families of gipsy children clothed in nothing but their natural skin, glorious to look upon as ripe horse-chestnuts. I will wager that that they do not suffer for lack of a national health service, water on tap, and modern sanitation.

When Gustou reached me, he stopped to say his 'Bon jour'.

'Where are you going this morning?' I asked 'To the travail,' he replied. 'Corat has lost a shoe.'

'Sit down, then,' I said. 'Join me with a café au rhum. I saw Georges Bissac take his team to the blacksmith a few minutes ago. You would have to wait in any case, so wait here and talk to me.'

He would certainly have stopped for a chat, if I had been willing for him to do so, but an invitation to have a rest and a drink (albeit it was only about nine o'clock in the morning) was a pleasant little interlude. Café au rhum at that time of day was not uncommon, as I have said before. I must confess that this was not by any means the only occasion on which I toasted the morning sunshine with passing peasants. Not only did I find the drink appropriate but I enjoyed hearing about their life and work from those who inhabit this lovely land. Those of us who have spent our lives in tilling the soil have a common language of the earth which overcomes the difficulty of our different speech and dialects. Gustou sat down and heaved aside the burden of carrying the world. He looked tired. He always looked tired. He said

he was tired. That was always his first remark. As he sipped his drink, the morning sunshine pervaded his spirit gradually. He was doing something that he could do really well taking his repose. He was enjoying himself and even if he had said nothing, I should have enjoyed his company, for it is a pleasant thing to be in the atmosphere of anyone who is at ease. It is indeed an insensitive soul that does not feel and appreciate the spell of France as a whole. Countless numbers of people enjoy a visit to that land. I wonder how many realize that the reason for the pleasure derived is that it is always pleasant to be in the company of those who are enjoying themselves, as it is depressing to be with one who is a 'damp' sponge. France (as a whole) enjoys its work and in consequence enjoys its leisure. All essential occupations are dignified as part of the most important art - the art of living. France in the west, China in the east, know this secret and practise it. A nation's love of God can be gauged by its love and respect for the land (agriculture being the basis of all culture) and by its attitude to work.

After a few minutes' silent enjoyment of his café, Gustou's tongue became active and like a child he spilled out of his head, in statement and unanswered question, the thoughts that came to him. It went something like this:

'Have you seen that piece of wheat near Le Borderie on Foussac's farm? Lovely, isn't it? The sow that Madame Meyrolle bought at Sarlat fair has had a litter of fourteen, and, mon Dieu, they are as pretty as maize in the cob. There is no rabougri amongst them. That is wonderful. I have never seen a family like that without one weakling. Chapelot's wife is expecting another baby soon. That will be her seventh. Quelle richesse! She looks large enough to have triplets. I am sure she would praise high heaven if she had. She loves children. What a mother! Some women today do not want children. I wonder for what they live. Have you tried Chapou's cherry brandy? Give him a hand when he is picking cherries and he will offer you a glass that his grandfather inherited on his marriage. That was in 1897. It is soft, innocent as a baby. Have you had any crayfish this season?

Do you like them? I will bring you a dozen or two. I drove to Souillac fair yesterday with Lambert. He wanted to buy a cow. As you know, he can afford a good one. He bought the best. What a beauty! Gentle eyes, glossy coat, fine neck, grand udder - all that pleases the eye indeed. But as we began to lead her out of the town, Lambert met an old friend and stopped to talk. The cow lay down in the middle of the road while he talked. You know the street is narrow. A cart came along, followed by other carts. We moved aside, but the cow did not budge. She lay there, looking quite content, chewing her cud. Lambert prodded her gently. She took no notice. People began to collect. They invited her to get up. She did not accept the invitation. The street became blocked with people and carts. One man took hold of her horns and tried to persuade her to rise. Then two men tried, one at each horn. In fact many people tried their various ideas, but the cow did not take the slightest notice, looked perfectly content, obviously not ill. Perhaps she had walked to the fair from a distant farm and really did need a rest. When all had tried, failed, and stood around her, wondering what could be done, a thought came into my head that she might be deaf. Have you ever heard of a deaf cow? No? Nor I, but I went up to her, put my mouth to her ear and shouted as loud as I could: "Get up, my dear!" She got up and came quietly home with us. Tout le monde était bien étonné.'

'I am not surprised that everyone was astonished, Gustou,' I said. 'But there is Georges going back with his oxen, and you must go and get yours shod now. I will come with you. I want a word with the *maréchal*.'

As a matter of fact, I wanted to make sure that Gustou did not waste any more of his employer's time than was necessary. His thoughts would have continued to flow into words.

The shoesmith was only 200 yards away. The team was unyoked and Corat, who had lost a shoe, was put in what I suppose would be called a *chantier* in correct French, though I have never heard it called anything except *le travail* – just as we should say in slang 'the works'. This is a sort of large crate, in which a beast can stand. It consists of four stout posts let into the ground with a strong framework at the top, fastening all the posts together so that they are rigid. On the top are two windlasses with rachets. On the windlasses are two wide bands of webbing which are passed under the body of the beast just behind its forelegs and just in front of its hind ones. As the windlasses are wound the weight of the beast's body is gradually taken off its feet, so that it is almost slung. Its head (and horns) stick out at the end of the *ravail.

This is necessary because, though oxen are most gentle and tractable, one cannot lift a leg at a time, as with a horse. They object to this. With their weight taken off their legs, the shoesmith can lift any leg that he chooses. In fact, when the maréchal has a mate, it is the custom to shoe one fore leg and one bind leg at the same time, one on the near side and one on the off side. To on the comfort for both man and beast, little blocks are fixed on the uprights of the travail on which the legs are rested. It is all a most simple and practical arrangement.

Here I left Gustou to enjoy another little repose and bade him and the shoesmith good day.

14. Tobacco and an Emigrant

Many of these peasants grow tobacco. This likes a deep rich soil and is therefore planted only in the valley, not on the adjoining slopes. In practice they apply more dung to this than to any other crop. Its manufacture and sale is a government monopoly, and the entire crop has to be sold to the government, which sends round inspectors to estimate the amount that each grower must deliver. Such estimates can be almost exact, for the plants are spaced at given distances in the rows (about 14 inches) with a given space between the rows (about 26 inches). This has been proved by experience to give the best result as to yield and quality. Cultivation is thorough, not a single weed of any kind being allowed to grow. Tobacco is, of course, a 'smother' crop, when it is fully developed, and when it is cut there is literally not a weed to be seen. Some peasants sow the seed, where it is to grow. Others sow in cold frames and plant out the seedlings, just as they do with mangolds or sugar-mangolds (which most prefer). For those few British farmers who do this, I should like to mention that the peasants do not transplant till the plants have formed appreciable roots, nearly the size of pigeon eggs, and that they trim off most of the leaves with a knife at the time. Plants of this size are easy to handle and put in; work proceeds very quickly with two people, one making a hole with an iron bar, the other following with a dibber. The plants must, of course, be made really firm in their holes. In spite of a hotter climate than ours and a lower rainfall, I could find no failures in the crop, and it seems to me eminently practical for our conditions. As the leaves are cut off, there is no flagging, and young ones soon sprout. The time spent in dibbing is saved by the fact that there is no singling or cutting out and practically no hocing, for there is time to get the land thoroughly clean by cultivations. Here and there some weed between the plants may need removal, but for the rest, row-crop implements do all that is required. I commend a trial of this method side by side with our usual practice, keeping account of costs and yields. It is certainly pleasant to see these plots of sugar-mangolds without a single gap in them.

Tobacco is planted in positions where it obtains all the sunshine throughout the day. When full growth has been reached, the flowering head is cut off, and the lowest leaves, which are either discoloured or a little coarse, are removed. The variety used has a head of small heliotrope-coloured flowers, which must not be cut too soon or side branches will develop. In practice this means that nine or ten leaves are left on each plant and are, of course, the best.

Tobacco is cut in the mornings only, sometimes with a sharp knife but more commonly with sécateurs. It is laid carefully in rows, so that each stalk gets full sun upon it, but it is collected and carted home in the afternoon. It must only be left long enough to wilt. It must lose no colour and must not be scorched. The stalks are hung up on strings in sheds or under caves, where it gets plenty of air but no sunshine directly upon it, except the mild rays of early morning or late evening.

The stalks are allowed to remain till late autumn or winter. They provide then the occasion for other domestic fêtes, like the déplissager of maize and the énoisement of walnuts. The leaves are stripped from the stems, are graded according to size, and made up into a manoc of ten, that is to say, nine leaves are bound together with the tenth. The local manoc is, of course, the Latin manus or hand, and main in French. Ten of these are then made up into bullou (bundle) or botte, as the French would term it. In 'hat state they are ready for delivery to the factory at Souillac. Theoretically the whole crop goes to the factory, but of course it does not. It is not, however, sold on the marché noir. Those who grow it keep enough for their own use and exchange it for other things with neighbours and friends, who do not grow it. Anyone who helps these peasants can have a pound of tobacco as often as he likes, and it will be pure tobacco.

I remember my initiation into the curing and cutting of

it. It was a Sunday morning and I was having a café au rhum with Estève Maynard, when our mutual friend Gustou stopped.

'To what port are you going?' I asked.

'I have no tobacco,' he replied. 'Come with me, if you are short and we will prepare some.' I agreed, not because I was in his state, but because I like his company and wanted to see the process.

'Alain Brissac's cellar is the nearest place to find tobacco. Let us go there. You know him. You were helping him with his vendanges when I first met you,' he said.

'Have you some of your own tobacco there?' I asked.

'No,' he replied. 'But we can help ourselves. That is understood!'

We soon arrived *chez* Brissac and went straight to the large unlocked cellar, over which the whole old stone farmhouse was built in the local traditional way. Along one side were rows of barrels of various vintages, a huge *cuve* in which the grapes were trodden, a press, large copper basins and jugs, haytorks, axes, mattocks, baskets, and I know not what.

The hayforks have three tines and are made entirely of wood by a local craftsman He gets the desired shape by choosing, for example, a growing ash sapling that had branches growing out of the stem on either side at the same point. He ties these to the stem, so that they and the stem are almost parallel to one another, and leaves them for a year. By that time, their growth has become fixed in the way desired The sapling is then cut, the stem and trained sidebranches are topped, and the result is, so to speak, a wooden trident. It is then all worked down with a spoke-shave, knife, and sandpaper, producing a tool that is light, durable, and excellent for its job, the tines being slightly curved like those in our metal forks. A similar fork is to be seen in the County Museum at Aylesbury. The axes were just medieval halberds - the work of the local blacksmith - which we should put in museums, for we have lost the skill to make them.

Hanging from beams were plenty of 'hands' of tobacco that had not reached the factory. Gustou took one down, untiedit, and put the dried leaves into a bucket of cold water. Then he stirred them about with his hands, squeezing them as if they were sponges. After a while they looked and felt much like a number of gloves made of chamois leather. When he was satisfied that they were thoroughly soaked, he took them out and wrung the water out of them. They were then ready for cutting.

The apparatus used is home made, simple, effective. In brief, it consists of a metal tube, having a length of a foot or so and a diameter of about an inch and a quarter. It is bolted to a bench. Into one end of it the leaves are put, being pushed in with a wooden baton that is slightly smaller in size than the tube, which has some holes on its underside to enable the water to run out from the leaves. At the other end of the tube a plate is fixed, so that the leaves can be rammed against this plate with the baton, whereby they are tightly packed into a hard mass against this plate, which has a circular hole in the centre of it, much smaller than the diameter of the tube. A slicer is fitted to the plate and is moved by hand, cutting both ways, for the slicer is simply a triangular knife section of the standard type used in a grass-mower, similar to our own.

The apparatus can be worked by one person, but it is easier with two, one slicing and one ramming in the leaves. I did the ramming, and we soon had a pound or two of tobacco, cut as finely as anyone could desire and (to my surprise) nearly dry enough to smoke. Gustou teased it, spread it out well on a board and carried it into the sunshin, where it was soon in condition to roll into a cigarette (which the peasants make for themselves) or for filling a pipe. As a rule, however, the tobacco is allowed to dry slowly in a room after being sliced, and then some eau-de-vie is added. (One more use for this brandy!) Some add a little honey as well, but as tobacco is always available, there is really no need to make "it keep, like that which is for sale.

Everyone becomes accustomed to his own brand of

'smoke' and at first this natural tobacco seems strange to our taste, but this soon adapts itself and then English or American cigarettes seem to be 'dope' rather than tobacco. At least that is the opinion that I had just expressed, when Brissac appeared. He showed no surprise at seeing us nor at being offered some of his own tobacco! He only told Gustou to see that I filled my pouch, and dropped into a conversation about métayage. This is a very old custom practised in southern France, northern Italy, and (for all that I know) other places. The owner of a farm that he does not wish or is unable to manage himself lets it to some cultivateur, who may have no capital but understands farming; not for an agreed rent in money but on the basis of sharing the produce in crops and livestock. In general, the owner finds the money, the *métayer* does all the work and the profit (in kind) is divided. Either is then at liberty to sell what he chooses of his share. It is a practice that works admirably where there is mutual goodwill and strict honesty on both sides. Its survival is testimony to the fact that through the ages there must have been these qualities. It is nowadays tending to be viewed with disfavour. It lends itself, of course, to all sorts of disputes, deceit, and suspicion, especially when the owner of the land lives in town and does not understand husbandry.

Recent regulations strive to get rid of the practice, for it is certainly best for each farmer to own the land he tills in any country whatsoever. But it is doubtful if the new Act can be put into practice. By this the métayer is entitled to demand at any time that the owner shall buy him out. The fact was overlooked that the owner is frequently without the financial means to do this. So what? That is the question. It has not been answered and we left it unanswered, though agreeing that métayage should go.

Brissac's farm was at the end of the village. As Gustou and I were returning with our 'spoils', we had only gone a short way when he suddenly stopped, as a countryman does when he sees or hears something unusual. With wondering eyes he turned to me and said:

'Whatever has happened?'

I heard nothing, saw nothing unusual. I was nonplussed and asked:

'Did you see something?'

'No,' he replied.

'Did you hear something?' I asked.

'No,' he replied again. But did you not notice anything? No? But something has happened in the village. Let us go and find out.'

Completely puzzled, I agreed, and we quickened our pace. On reaching the rue du Moulin, it was clear to me that there was something afoot. All the inhabitants of the street were out in it in little groups. For the most part, heads were bowed. In all, there was an atmosphere of gravity, which no doubt Gustov ic't. News spreads through a village, as through the jungle, as fast as a forest fire, driven by the wind. As, too, the air, before a storm breaks, is charged so much that all can notice it, so a human emotion, evoked in the inhabitants of a village can be felt by one of its members at a distance. Gustou was undoubtedly aware that something untoward had happened but did not know what it was. People more primitive, that is, with their innate gifts still less damaged by our civilization, would have known the news as well as felt the emotion. Wireless transmission and television by mechanical means could not be, unless similar communication were possible between human beings - a fact recognized perhaps only by those who have contemplated the science of correspondence between natural and spiritual things.

What had happened? Divested of all speculation, here is the story.

Georges Lestard walked into the garden of the widow Meinier, who was tending her vines, and passed down the path beside her without so much as a formal greeting and without any explanation of his entry into her little domain. Surprised – or rather, staggered – by such behaviour, she called after him:

'Where are you going?'

'Down your well,' he replied without pausing or turning round.

As the well was thirty feet deep and he elected to go down head foremost, you can understand that he was drowned before it was possible to get him out.

Georges left behind him a widow, three sons, a mystified community, and his watch, which he carefully placed on the ground beside the well, before diving into it. The general opinion was that he chose the widow Meinier's well because it was the deepest in the village, but no one but the good Lord and Georges himself will ever know the reason for his descent into it. Even the women, whose imagination can solve most things, had to confess themselves nonplussed in this case, so you must not expect me to attempt to offer any explanation.

Everyone was speculating about another aspect of the tragedy. How would his family fare without Georges? He, like his forebears and the local inhabitants at large, was a capable and energetic small farmer. His elder boys, aged eighteen and seventeen, never appeared to have the same spirit as their father, and the youngest boy was still at school. Responsibility was, however, the very thing that these boys needed to make men of them. If Madame Lestard experienced any anxiety about their livelihood, it must have been of short duration, for these boys worked so well that it was a pleasure to look at their plots of wheat, oats, maize, asparagus, sugar-beet, and vineyard. Madame herself and the youngest boy, Marcial, looked after the cows and some beautiful Toulouse geese.

I admired these greatly. I often stopped and had a chat with her about the many little things that are common to countryfolk. We became in fact well acquainted with one another and I was not surprised when the eldest boy came to me one evening and asked me in a very serious voice if I would do them the favour of driving some of them to Le Havre in my car – a distance of over 400 miles. (They did not know the distance.) Of course I would take them, but what had happened? A relative had died? No. A friend was

to be married? No. Someone was scriously ill? No. A celebration of *première communion*? No. I could see that the young man hoped that I would guess correctly, to save him the difficulty of telling me but I had to give up and ask him.

'Marcial has decided to go to Canada,' came the reply in the manner of a judge passing sentence. This aptly suited the answer, for a decision of that kind by Marcial was as final as that of a court of appeal. He was thoughtful beyond his years, quiet and religieux by nature. His heart did not turn to the world. He would help his brothers in the fields, when he had time, and his mother with the livestock and the home, and he enjoyed all this work. That was evident, but he would sit all alone, when he had the opportunity, and read The little flowers of St Francis or the Confessions of St Augustine or The Spiritual maxims of Brother Lawrence. The Bible is not in common use in French homes, though the principles contained in it are embodied in what is known to the French as the catechism, so I once gave Marcial a copy of the New Testament Never in my life have I made a present of any kind that gave so much delight. It was a pocket edition and really lived in his pocket, when he was not reading it, or under his pillow at night. And if he is still alive, I know that it will still be treasured above all else, though I suspect that he has long ago learnt it by heart - if not in detail, then certainly in substance.

His decision to go to Canada had been made for the following reason. By French law possessions of deceased parents must be divided equally among the children. The farm, if halved, would have sufficed for two tamilies, but would have been too small for three. All could see this and Marcial, young though he was, had been pond ring how this problem could be solved, but he had not spoken about it till he had found the answer.

He would go to Canada, to some district where French settlers were numerous and his own language was spoken. He would work hard, save his earnings, and buy a little place of his own on his return. Then he could make a home for his mother, when his brothers were married. It was a

plan that was typical of the boy's spirit, and no one doubted that he would succeed, but the thought of parting was hard indeed for them all.

We in England, a seafaring race in an over-populated island, come and go all over the world, and to every village partings and returnings are familiar happenings. Not so to our Continental neighbours, particularly to those who live in countrysides that are far distant from the sea. They have their roots deeper in their native soil and over more centuries than we have. To leave all for a foreign land needed something more than the normal bravery of human hearts. It was felt that Marcial's faith, young though he was, would be strong enough to meet his own need, but all wondered and were anxious about his mother, for he was her youngest, her baby. For that reason there was probably a sanctuary in her heart, where some little extra tenderness was his, and his alone.

Anyone who had witnessed the sailing of an emigrant ship will understand why I suggested that the farewell should take place at home and that I should drive Marcial alone to Le Havre. His mother would not, as I really expected, agree to this. She wanted to see as much of him as possible, so it was decided that I should take her, Marcial, and Louis (the second son) leaving the eldest boy at home to milk the cows and take general charge. As the boat left port in the morning, we had to start in the evening before and drive through the summer night. With a long and tiring journey before us, Madame Lestard should have rested during the day, but mother-like she had spent it in going through Marcial's equipment over and over again to make certain that everything was there and in good repair. The inevitable result, of course, was that she was tired before we began our journey. She sat in the back seat with Marcial. We travelled in silence in the hope that she would get some sleep, but from time to time the sound of gentle sobbing indicated that, though her fingers could busy themselves no longer with Marcial's clothes, her mind was still hard at work, busying itself no doubt with her memories of his life from the time of her

travail at his birth to the travail of parting, that drew nearer hourly.

Following local bye-ways I made for Brive on the great Route Nationale N.20, which begins in the Pyrenecs and goes to Paris via Toulouse, Cahors, Limoges, and Orléans. It meant about 150 miles of tortuous roads in semi-mountainous country until we reached the central plain of France in the neighbourhood of Châteauroux.

Beauty is, as a rule, shy of main roads, but through this hilly part of Périgord and Bas Limousin the population is sparse. There has been no outrage to the countryside, no exploitation. The road, well engineered to give an even gradient, winds like a snake for a mile or two or three up to some plateau, where poor soil admits of little cultivation and even trees a somewhat stunted. Then it winds down again to some fertile little valley with village or hamlet set beside a stream, looking snug and homely. Then the road will repeat its tortuous ascent and descent over and over again until one becomes riddy and longs for a little bit of straight road.

It was a lovely summer evening and every village was a picture of delight. With the day's work over, boys and girls were splashing in the streams, children paddling in them. The older men would be fishing or just sitting and enjoying the whole, keeping an eye on the livestock. The older women would be knitting, always knitting, whether they were walking about or not. Cattle, goats, and sheep, all trained to obey as readily as dogs, were an integral part of each community. Each little village was an idyll, similar in general to many others but differing in detail. Each was a haven, set in between less homely uplands, untroubled (because self-supporting) by the storms of war or by the fashions and foibles of urban life.

Such a scene would be in the village that we had left far behind and indeed throughout the French countryside, and I could understand well why Madame Lestard's sobs were more frequent along this stretch of road than elsewhere. There is some sympathy between beauty (especially familiar beauty) and sorrow. The one enhances the other. As we were passing over the mountains of Ambazac, the last of the afterglow was mirrored in the great tarn, which skirts the highway for a mile or more, surprisingly at its highest point. Thereafter we journeyed through the semi-darkness of the summer night, silent, all of us. We left the Toulouse-Paris highway at Châteauroux and travelled via Blois, Châteaudun, Chartres, Dreux, and Evreux to Rouen - roads familiar to me. This is an area of great spaces, all arable, one of the corn-growing belts of France. Fields of 100 acres in size are the rule rather than the exception: grosse culture, as it is termed. There are no hedges, no hills, few woods and hardly any trees except those planted on each side of every road. Villages are miles apart, the roads run straight for leagues on end with an occasional slight bend, the Romans having made them. It is a paradise for those who enjoy rushing over the face of the earth, seeing only the ribbon of road that stretches before them.

What thoughts coursed through the heads of my company, I cannot say. No one spoke. I drove on and on hour after hour through a sleeping countryside, meeting no car, seeing no soul except an occasional straggler in some town through which we passed. We pulled into Rouen as day was just breaking over the fortress-hill where William the Norman was born. Against the sky I could see the iron spire that surmounts the Cathedral and lured me to its pinnacle, when I was young, and I could pick out the outline of the Tour de Beurre, so called because it was built with money obtained by selling indulgences: in this case the permission to cat butter during Lent.

Here we joined the main Paris—Le Havre highway and following it drove straight to the port and down to the docks. We had an hour or more to spare and plenty of time to enjoy a petit déjeuner at the Café du Quai. Time to enjoy it, yes, but not the ability to do so, though the coffee was good and the milk of the richest, being doubtless the produce of the fine Isigny cows.

But our spirits were heavy, heavy as the air. What a

difference in climate there can be in a few hundred miles! In the central plain, far from sea and mountains, the air is clear and light, visibility is immense, feet tend to run and lips to laughter. Here, on the Manche, the sky was overcast, the air dense, our depression intensified by the leaden weight of the atmosphere, though even here it is lighter than in England.

We were a sad and silent group. All attempts at conversation were forced, unreal. Madame Lestard managed to drink a little coffee between her sobs. An aching heart that mounted to her throat prevented her from eating, and we found it difficult and pleasureless.

I drove slowly down the docks till we came close to the emigrant ship, the only one that had sailed to Canada for many years. Already a train had arrived and unloaded its content of many nationalities. They were speaking languages familiar and unfamiliar to me. All looked sad. All had already said their adicus to their homelands and relatives a day or more before but sorrow still weighed heavily on them. They had come from Poland, Latvia, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, and I know not where else. They mounted the gangway on to the ship silently, sorrowfully, and disappeared.

The French emigrants had arrived, like Marcial, with relatives or friends to bid them God-speed. When the time came for them to go aboard, there were the most heart-rending farewells. Tears fell like rain from the eyes of all men, women, and children, and the air was filled with countless forms of cry and sob, some muffled by a depth of feeling, some brave, some hysterical. Here a fisher-girl threw her arms round the ankles of her young man, pressed them to her bosom, and begged him not to go after all. There a mother fainted. There a father took from under his shirt a little crucifix that was held by a thin gold chain round his neck, placed it in like manner on his son and begged him to remember the good Lord every day of his life. Here a little boy was asking his elder brother (or so he appeared to be) to come back tomorrow. There a granty stood telling her

beads, her eyes too weak to recognize her grandson waving to her from the deck, her faith strong enough to give her still further vision.

Madame Lestard folded her arms round Marcial, her head resting on his shoulder, her heart too full for words. There she remained sobbing quietly till the call sounded for the gangway to be lifted. Marcial embraced her tenderly all the time, his lips pressed to her forehead. When at last he had to leave her, he turned to me. Thanks for bringing them here were in his eyes. A request to look after his mother was there too, but he said nothing. His teeth were clenched, his lips trembled, but he dared not open his mouth to speak. Nor I either, for that matter. What heart could remain untouched by such a poignant scene?

You, who are rich, come and go by luxurious liners, say your farewells, with a wave of a handkerchief and a 'cheerio' to the gay strains of the ship's orchestra. For you it is just a case of au revoir. You will meet again in a few weeks or a few months, for the world is yours and is small—for you. For these others, it is vastly different. It is nearly always a final farewell. Many leave with the intention of returning to their homeland, when they have earned and saved enough to do so. But they go young, their hearts lead them to marry, when they have the means to do so, and their life thereafter is centred naturally round their new abode. Now and again one may become sufficiently prosperous to enable him to bring his wife on a visit to Europe but such cases are rare, and few indeed go, like Marcial, with a celibate's vow in their hearts.

When the gang-planks had been lifted, the emigrants lined the ship's side, but conversation with their loved ones was, of course, no longer possible. Still, they were furnished by the stewards with one frail link with the shore. All were given paper streamers. These, when thrown, unwound themselves, as they flew through the air. The throwers on deck kept hold of one end and those on shore caught or picked up the other. So in a few minutes the scene took on the appearance of carnival. Handreds of streamers of all colours floated

in the air and formed a last cord by which unspeken and unspeakable words might travel from heart to heart. So gay indeed was the sight, that shouts of delight came from the little children present, from those, that is, who were too young to appreciate the sadness of farewell.

There was a generous supply of streamers. Marcial had a red one with his mother, a blue one with Louis, and a white one with me. I feel sure that to him they were symbols of faith, hope, and charity, for his mind worked in that way. To his mother the red streamer was, no doubt; the sign of a bleeding heart. Her sobs ceased now, but tears rolled unchecked down her checks from eyes that did not blink, being fixed on her boy. Her poor small body trembled with such deep emotion that Louis and I took an arm each and counselled her to accept our support.

Soon after the gangway, were up, the siren sounded, the great engines throbbed into life and the liner began to move, so slowly at first that we could all stroll along the quay beside it. As it gained impet is, it drew away from the dock, and we had to pay out little by little the remainder of our streamers, ever increasing our pace and ever having to give more support to Madame Lestard, till at last we were virtually lifting her along.

As the liner went forward, it slewed round (you must not expect a farmer to know nautical terms) and as it slewed, the streamers began to break one by one. Heart-rending cries went up and several women fainted.

Louis and I had led his mother to the end of the group on the quay, so that she should have a free last glimpse of Marcial, and we stood there supporting all her weight, light in body; heavy with sorrow.

Louis's and my streamers broke first, and I felt glad that the last link was between the mother and her boy.

Since we began our journey, she had never spoken a word. In the car she just put her arm through Marcial's and communicated her thoughts and feelings to him by touch. For the rest of the time she had just looked into his eyes, tenderly, silently, sadly. But when we caught a final glimpse of

his hand, waving the remains of the streamers, she opened her lips and said quietly but firmly: 'A Dieu', as if she had said amen to a prayer. Then her head fell back on Louis's shoulder, her eyes became tree of tears, fixed as they were on the horizon of another world than ours.

We laid her gently down. I closed her eyelids and called a gendarme.

15. The Porter

At the entrance door of the village inn where we often stop stands a porter in a black and white livery. He bows politely and stands aside when anyone goes in or out, but he does not offer his services in any way. He is only studying his own interest which is his stomach – and he is there only at meal-times.

The porter is a very handsome drake. He belongs to a breed of duck that the peasants here in the Dordogne valley call the canard-dinde. Of course they know that it is not a cross between a duck and turkey, but its crimson wattles and lobes certainly give some suggestion of a turkey's head. I do not remember seeing this breed often in Britain, though I have met it frequently on the Continent under the name of Muscovy duck.

The porter could almost be selected as a suitable symbol of this fat and lovely land, where there is little or no difference between war and peace, as far as food and drink and tobacco are concerned. The peasants produce a superabundance of all these, doing all the work at their pleasure and (I may add) leisure, and if they or any of their livestock fail to flourish, it will certainly not be due to any lack of nourishment. Possibly the reverse, for food and drink are not the main interest of the porter only.

He stands at the entrance door of the inn, because from that point he can get a view of the tables in the kitchen and dining-room. If any crumbs or other morsels fall from either, he dives in (yes, that really describes his action), grabs them, and dashes out again, far more quickly than one could imagine possible for such a weighty bird. He knows quite well the risk that he is taking – from someone's foot or hand – but he takes it, like a mischievous schoolboy. He is not deterred by an occasional failure or clout – at least not for long. He will be there again sure enough at the next meal.

He is forbidden to come into this inn, because it has a unique reputation for cleanliness, a quality that is rare in this countryside, where wine has more use and more uses than water in many homes. Here the floors are sprinkled daily with water and the rubbish that collects is swept out with a broom (I don't suppose that a scrubbed floor has ever been envisaged) and I must confess that this standard of cleanliness sufficed to keep the place free of flies, fleas, and other unpleasant insects.

If you walk down any of the little narrow streets of the village (they are just wide enough for the narrow ox-carts) you will see other porters with their wives and families in attendance. They are of all ages and sizes from ducklings to gorgeous sergeant-majors like our drake. They have an air of ownership. If they are on their feet, they will move out of your way. If they are lying in the road, packed tightly together, as the half-grown ducks frequently are, they expect you to let them enjoy their siesta and walk round them. Even on the one hard road on the outside of the village, over which cars and lorries can travel, they insist on their prior right of way to these inventions of modern times, and drivers respect that right. They pass slowly and carefully round them, and if there is no room to do this, they sound their horns till the sleepers edge out of the way slowly and reluctantly. They have evidently established squatters' rights! They spend their whole lives in the streets till they are fattened for the table, some of them as large ducklings, some in mature age, on home-grown maize. They sleep in any corner that takes their fancy and are, in fact, complete street urchins. They fare well. Outside the door of every house stands a large bowl into which is poured the water in which the plates and dishes have been washed. This looks, and indeed is, as rich as soup, being full of the superabundance with which the tables here are loaded. It provides both food and drink to the chickens as well as ducks - a simple and excellent example of thrift.

The ducks do not have things all their own way. They have to share the streets with numbers of chicken and dogs.

From time to time there is a difference of opinion or a dispute of rights between a drake and his family and a cock and his retinue. Hackles go up, heads go down. All seems set for a lively sparring match. The matter, however, is over quickly. The result is always the same. The cock gives way. One could expect the pointed beak to be the better weapon, but the long neck of the drake enables it to make such a heavy stab that no cock can stand up against it.

The drake is not merely the cock of the walk, as it were. He is also the aristocrat. All the ducks appear to be purebred – a great contrast to the fowls and dogs. The former have some slight resemblance to certain known breeds, but the dogs present the most amazing variety of size, shape, and colour that it is possible to imagine. Their ancestry can rarely be guessed. Even their great grandparents must have lost their pedigree, it they ever had any. Their owners put them in two general classes. They are described either as 'fox' or as chiens de chasse. The 'fox' is supposed to be a fox-terrier, whatever it looks like. It is, in fact, any small, sprightly dog, quick in its movements.

The sporting dogs are used when their owners are out shooting hares, rabbits, partridges, pheasants, and wild boar and many of them are excellent. Through the wooded (and often rocky) hill-sides, it is a distinct advantage for a dog to have a tongue as well as a nose, and a criterion of merit is that it should have both.

All the dogs live in the streets, as do the ducks. But, whereas the ducks have a very limited range preferring to remain within call of the front door for gastronomic reasons, the dogs have the freedom of the city. Indeed they seem to have an *entrée* into every house – at least, except during the short winter, when doors are closed. I estimate that we have visits from at least two dozen on an average, some of them regular 'pub-crawlers', some of them casual callers. They stroll into the kitchen, then round the dining-room, then on to the covered terrace and finally round the vine-covered arbour. Tables and chair are in all these places and we have meals in any of them according to the temperature. The

vine-covered arbour is especially delightful on hot days when the sun throws golden circles and ovals of light on to the table-cloths, wine glasses, and floor, and it would be even more lovely at night but for the fact that moths and cicadas, attracted by the electric light, from time to time come in and crash into the soup or down one's neck.

All the dogs have not merely the freedom of the city but also the liberty to breed as, when, and how they like, and the resultant offspring is amazing. One that fascinates me by its most ridiculous appearance has a diminutive body, spotted black and white, with enormous pointed cars, large enough for any Alsatian. He fancies himself very much, poses as a man about town, often carries a hind leg to pretend that he is a roué, but is really too small to mate with any bitch in the place – a fact which does not, however, lessen his ardour for or attention to the ladies.

Our most constant visitor is something with a spaniel's feet, a terrier's body, and a sort of collie's head. He has soft eyes that plead, 'Please spare a crust for a poor starving dog'. Though he is clearly well-fed and, indeed, over-fed, we succumb to his entreaties. He is too insistent to be denied, and if all doors are barred against him, he will hear where we are feeding and will jump in through the open window, or barge in through the legs of anyone opening the door. There is no denying access to him, for no rebuff is heeded. Though his eyes are gentle, he is really very, very tough. Wild boar is his speciality.

Accustomed, as we are in England, to purity of breeds, particularly in our sporting dogs, it is hard to view these mongrels with impartiality and refrain from judging them by their outward appearance, but the fact must be admitted that they do well what is required of them and that is surely the supreme test of a gun-dog.

Furthermore, they have one great quality, perhaps the greatest quality that any community can possess. I have never known a dog-fight nor even the least sign of disagreement between any members of this heterogeneous mob. Perhaps, therefore, it might help us in our judgement of

them to recall that, if we look carefully into our own pedigree, we shall find that our blood is not so blue as it might be. The fancy of a man for a maid or vice versa has often proved stronger than genealogical trees — a fact that only the inhumane can condemn; and if there is some Christian community in which no quarrels ever occur, I at least have failed to find it. Humbly, therefore, I pay my respects to these walkers of our streets, who have learned to practise in their daily lives the way of peace and goodwill that is preached regularly at Christmas and violated most of the year in many human communities.

16. An Evening Gathering

I was out in good time one Sunday morning in mid-November. A thick white mist, presaging a warm sunny day, formed so much moisture on the trees that it felt like intermittent spots of rain on leaves of walnut, poplar, and other trees, whose leaves were beginning to fall. We in England often have a taste of St Luke's little summer for a few days. Here there are always some weeks of it – lovely weeks, in which there is a certain mellowness in earth and air and sunshine. Earth has given its seasonal riches. Barn, attic, and cellar are full of them. Preparation for another year has begun. All the wheat has been sown, beans have been set, cabbages planted. Only the artichokes remain to be lifted and they can be dug at will during the winter, for the slight frosts that may occur will not affect them.

Thoughts have turned to the woodlands, the cutting and carting of fuel and to *la chasse* – of rabbit, hare, wild boar, partridge. Every Sunday morning men will be out with guns and dogs, having tinkling bells round their necks, so that their owners can hear where they are. Occasional shots will ring out and reverberate from hill to hill across the wide valley. Gibier of some sort or other will appear on many a table. A woodcock for me, please, if I may choose.

But for the patter of drops on the leaves, all was very still and silent. I heard nothing, saw nothing, till quite suddenly a figure on a bicycle loomed up in front of me, seeming to have an enormously long body with no head! This was, of course, only a momentary impression. An instant later I recognized Aubin Foussac.

It is interesting to notice that not only do surnames differ here from those in France proper but also the Christian names, and, for that matter, those of cats, dogs, and farm livestock. Aubin is one of the Christian names I have never met outside of this region, nor have I met with Martial, Estève, Nanon, Félicité, nor pet names such as Gustou for Auguste and Jeanou for Jean, Mariette for Marie, Francette, and Nancette. I am quite certain that no French cattle would heed if they were addressed as Quinou, Bonel, Cobrol, Uta, Folbet, Pulpan, or (in plain English) as Rosic. My French dictionary does not mention them and I presume that they have Roman origins.

In any event Aubin was performing the feat of carrying a guil cartridges, and a dog, while riding a bicycle. This sounds impossible to us, but in France it is not. Cuns are provided with a strap, so that they can be slung over the shoulder, leaving both hands free. How often have I silently cursed our gunsmiths for my cold hands, simply because I could not put them in my trouser pockets and keep them warm. Will British gunmakers kindly take note and make the desired small loops for straps? Cartridges are carried in a bandolier, so that the, are instantly at hand, if required in a hurry. And the dog? This being trained to do exactly as required, was wrapped round Aubin's neck, like a woman's stole. With one hand he gripped all four legs and tail of his dog and with the other steered his cycle. The dog or rather bitch was of Labrador type and size and answered to the unusual name of Trompette. She was quite accustomed to travel in this way, though a more common form of dog-transport is in a basket on the front handle-bars. As hunting in the wooded hills with their rocky bluffs here and there is very tiring for les chiens de chasse, their masters thoughtfully save them as much 'foot-slogging' as possible.

Since writing this I have come across (strangely enough) this name applied to a dog in an old English book. More than that. It gives the reason for the name. It was given to dogs whose tails curled up and over on to their backs, so that they looked like trumpets. The French name and spelling was still used in the English book.

I like Aubin. Everyone likes him. Many a maiden's heart must get excited in his presence, for he is very handsome indeed. His popularity is known to all – except himself, for it is clear that he is as unselfconscious as a babe. He is of

rather more than medium height, not quite broad enough at hips and shoulders at present, because he is only nineteen, but he is in appearance and in fact an aristocrat, one of God's gentlemen. He would stand out, if dressed in appropriate clothes, in any company whatsoever, and even his oldest working 'kit' cannot disguise him. He has dark brown hair, bluish-green eyes and every feature of his face is perfectly modelled. There is nothing coarse in ears or nose, in chin or lips, because evidently his mind harbours no vulgar thoughts (indeed he blushes at the utterance of them by others) and no indulgence of any appetite has left its external sign. He exemplifies indeed the old saying that 'Handsome is, as handsome does'.

Providence has been on his side. The war ended just before he was due to be called up for military service, so he has been spared the ordeal which ended many lives and (just as bad) poisoned the heart of the majority of those that survived in body. He has remained gentle, as God made him, and as we should all 1emain, if we claim to be gentlemen. But he is not effeminate in the least degree. He is strong, having used his limbs to good purpose all his life. As a little boy, he seemed to spend half the day giving a pick-a-back to his baby brother, till the latter could walk, and when the little brother was old enough to go to school but unable to walk so far, Aubin used to pull him there and back - a distance of mile and a halt each way - in a box on two wheels which he had made. There was a steep pull of quite half a mile up to the school, but I think that Aubin was glad of that, for he could return at full gallop with his carriole and passenger, as soon as school was over - shouting with delight as he rushed along.

He was always anxious to get home. He liked to take part in anything and everything that happened on the farm. Moreover, like most country boys, he always had something of his very own to feed, such as a lamb or kid, some rabbits or a sitting bantam or (as the peasants term it) a quinquinette. Quite naturally – as naturally as breathing – he acquired the art of life and the wisdom of husbandry.

He was content. His hands were busy, his heart loved the fields, the woods, the livestock, and the beauty of all that surrounded him. His work was his hobby or his hobby his work (whichever you will) and surely that is how it should be for everyone and how it would be in any sane community. So long as anyone imagines that he can find happiness in anything except his work, he has not the slightest chance of doing so.

For recreation Aubin would go of evenings sometimes and catch a few fish in the Dordogne - some trout or bream, a plump barbel, or un panier of crayfish - and on Sunday mornings in winter he would roam the woods with his dog and gun. Whether he shot any game or not, and whether he even saw anything to shoot - that made no difference whatever to his enjoyment. He had not the sportsman's idea of pleasure. He looked at all things - even down the barrels of a gun - with the eyes of a poet, though the lines that he wrote were drawn across the fields with a plough and the rhythm in them was heard as he used a flail. Unlike others of his age, he preferred to be alone - not because he was shy or unsociable, but merely because he did not need any external stimulus. He joined in all the rejoicing at festivals, communal or domestic, but he initiated none of the fun. It was on the farm that his enterprise, planning and imagination found expression. Where he had been busy, there was always some touch - discernible only by the most observant eye - to show a little more forethought or just a little more care than his neighbours; a difficult thing, where all are farming well.

Yes. I like Aubin and those arc only ε few of my reasons for doing so. We never pass one another with a simple greeting. I like to have a few words with him at any time and he, like all these peasants (men and women) is never pressé. They are never in a hurry, but very far from idle.

When, therefore, I saw that the queer misty figure on the bicycle was Aubin, I stepped out in front, put out both my arms as if to embrace him. He slowed down and came into my arms, not wishing to dismount with his load.

'I was coming to see you,' he said. 'We are going to *énoiser* (shell walnuts) this evening. The neighbours and some friends will be coming in after supper. But my parents would like you to have supper with us and spend the evening. Grandfather Daniel has come over from Cénac for the week-end, and he is a good *raconteur*. He is in his eighties now, but he remembers well many things of the past. I like to listen to stories about the years gone by. And you too, *n'est-ce pas*? It will be moonlight tonight, or I should have met you on the hard road and conducted you to our farm.'

I agreed gladly and found myself in the pleasant home which was the first to which I had been invited. Nothing had been altered in fifteen years except that the welcome was warmer and there was one more at table, i.e. grandfather Daniel, who had so much in common with Aubin that I had to exercise no imagination whatever to picture my young friend in his old age. It is strange how children – and, for that matter, cattle – tend to take after grandparents rather than parents. Similarity seems to leap-frog a generation, so to speak.

We sat down to a real peasants' supper. Those who are interested in dictetics might well study it, for it seems to me a perfect example of a balanced diet, as indeed meals anywhere in France invariably are. Of course everything was home-produced and fresh. That in itself made it superior to anything that the richest city-dweller can purchase. Here is the menu. We began with soupe, of course. I have already extolled this is a national dish. In this case, however, it was what is known as a chapon-fin, which (by the way) can be seen used as an inn sign. Instead of having any garlic in the soup, slices of homemade wholemeal bread are rubbed with garlic, so that there is just a soupçon (and no more) of that flavour and each person dips them in his soup and bites pieces off. This might not be approved at refined tables but it is extremely good. Of course we all poured some of our hosts' good red wine into our soup plate before we had finished and drank our chabrol. I do not know how any local

dialect is spelt, for I have never come across any book written in it. There is a hotel at Le Bugue with a sign in its honour and it is spelt Ol Boum Sobrol meaning (literally) 'To the good Sobrol'. I can only say that I have heard this word used by very many peasants and that I have spelt it in the way that it sounds to me. Occasionally in a local paper English words that have been used verbally for generations crop up. For example, the English word 'rough' is in common use. The local reporter spells it as 'ruffe,' giving it a French appearance, though quite falsely, for a Frenchman would pronounce this as two syllables and would not clip it to one, while the peasants pronounce it exactly as we do. (One sees similar instances with names. The Bruce family now appear as Brousse. They speak their name as we do, while a Frenchman again makes two syllables of it.)

The fact is that these peasants have this characteristic of the English too, i.e. that they speak indistinctly, often with closed lips, often clipping their words and failing to make their consonants clear, just as we do. That is in complete contrast with the French in general, whose pronunciation is meticulous. Yes, on mange les mots – just as much in the Dordogne valley as in England – making it still more difficult to understand either their putois or their bastard French. Fortunately it is quite easy to follow their thoughts and read their hearts – easy at least for any countryman who is in sympathy with their way of life.

After the soup we had something that is a great favourite with these peasants during the winter months. It is made as follows: Maize flour, well salted, is steeped in milk for at least twenty-four hours. Eggs and honey are then beaten into it, so that it has a consistency stifl enough to roll into balls in the hollow of the hand. These are then boiled in deep walnut oil and are delicious indeed. Nothing could be simpler, but do not imagine that it is possible to take a packet of corn-flour (which is of course flour from maize) mix in the ingredients given and fry it straight away. The result will bear no comparison whatsoever. Our cornflour is, like white wheat flour, as devoid of nourishment as human

cunning can make it and if one detects any flavour at all, it is of the packet that contains it. The peasants take their maize to the watermill, where it is ground on stones, and extract only the coarse bran, which is used for the cows or pigs. Colour, aroma, and nutriment remain in the flour. The peasants know too that no flour, however finely ground, can absorb moisture in a few minutes or hours. Time is required for this, and I beg our cooks to convince themselves of it by a trial. For example, make a cake mixture, divide it into two, bake one at once in the usual English way, keep the other for twenty-four hours before baking - and compare the results. If the cook cannot detect the enormous superiority of the latter, she had better give up the job and do something that requires no intelligence and no sense of taste. So long as people eat steamed bread and half-cooked flour in cakes, sauces, puddings, fritters, and so on, they descree to have indigestion.

But however faithfully one carries out this recipe, it will not have quite the exquisite flavour of the peasants' 'cakes', for their honey has far more aroma than ours. I cannot understand why this is, for the flowers from which the bees collect it arc, as I have said, precisely the same as our own. And here is another surprise: their apples do not have such a good flavour as ours. Even Cox's Orange Pippin does not nearly come up to our standard. Difference in soil and climate no doubt account for this, but can these factors affect honey too?

After the 'cakes' we had salad of lettuce, endive, and tomatoes, with a dressing of red-wine vinegar and walnut oil in the proportions ordained in the generally accepted recipe. This (translated) runs as follows:

One needs
A miser with the vinegar,
A spendthrift with the oil
And a fool to mix it!

On the table there were large dishes of pears, apples and walnuts, but Aubin disappeared for a few minutes and re-

turned with a basket of grapes. The best bunches had been put aside, hung on a line in the grenier, for use during the winter – for special occasions, of which énoisement ranked as one, being a kind of domestic fête.

During the meal we were all drinking their good red wine, of course, but with the fruit Madame Foussac produced a large bocal, or glass jar, full of apricots in brandy – and some sundae glasses. Into the bottom of each she put an apricot and then some of the brandy, using a large table-spoon for the purpose. And, after fruit, we finished with walnuts and an apricot brandy. To me such a meal is as near to perfection as any supper can be. We could have a similar one, but we shall have it only when we choose to do as these peasants (oh! pity the poor peasants again!) and produce it ourselves.

Many people must know the country saying: 'Chop your own wood and it warms you twice.' Which is the greater pleasure? The glow in the body that the exercise of chopping gives or the warmth from the fire?

I should like to supplement this saying with another: 'Grow your own food and it satisfies you twice.' and put another question: 'Which is the greater satisfaction?'

As we ate our walnuts, Aubin's father whispered in his ear, the boy disappeared again and came back with a couple of bottles of petit vin, a light wine but a sparkling one – to add to the gaiety of the occasion. As we sipped this, neighbours began to arrive, bringing sample bottles of their wine and little wooden mallets. The men used these for cracking the walnuts, while the women separated the kernels from the shells. As I had no mallet, and should have damaged the kernels, if I had, I did a woman's job but not at their speed. I could, however, keep pace with the rest in one thing. I could empty my glass as fast as the others!

It is at these little gatherings that stories are told, past events recalled. I have noticed that the older people speak of happenings not so much by dates as by occurrences. For example, instead of commencing with 'In 1906, etc.,' they will begin something like this, 'Two years after the Great

Hailstorm' or 'Three years after the Big Flood', and one can be sure that in their minds the arrival of the Colorado beetle will fix a point on the calendar, though the young folk of today follow our way.

Stories of ghosts and haunted houses, related in most vivid fashion, were mingled with those of the pranks of jesters, their type of humour being exactly the same as that of our own country folk, for their mentality is similar, as I have remarked before.

As I wanted to hear the old grand-père, I appealed to him to dig into his memory and tell us of something or someone, who had impressed him deeply. He was sitting in the inglenook with a glass of wine on the seat beside him. The blaze from the logs in the fire cast enough mellow light upon him to disclose his noble features, softened by time and another light – that from within. Never have I had greater desire to be able to paint that which I beheld.

He agreed, and though I had considerable difficulty in grasping his mixture of patois and local French, here is the gist of what he said:

'I have reached an age when memory has become like a pleasant child - not responsible for its actions and sometimes humorously mischievous. It will hide from my view the events of a week past and even take a delight in refusing to tell me where I put my pipe only a few minutes ago. But it is most obedient when I ask it to show me the days and ways of my childhood. It presents pictures as vividly as I saw them, when a boy. Yes, I could tell you of many things and people. Perhaps the one whose exploits appealed to me most was a man, whose name I never heard and of whom I only once had a glimpse, a bent old man with a white beard that seemed to cover the whole of his face except his eyes. He wore a curious hat, that I cannot describe, pulled down to his eyes, and I remember that his coat had large polished buttons of copper. It was the fascination (to me) of these buttons that prevented me from making a study of the man himself. He was known as the sorcier (wizerd) of Le Marrion. He was regarded with respect rather than affection by all, and by some with a certain amount of awe. None attributed evil to him, except possibly the priest out of jealousy. I do not see how they could, for he seemed to be at war with *Le Diable* in many ways.

'He was really the local doctor and vétérinaire in a rural area where there was neither of these in those days, but he had powers to which neither of these could lay claim. I remember my father telling me that he was talking one day to Delmas of the Mas Fourmac when le sorcier came along and said to him: "Your house has just caught fire. Hurry home and you will be in time to save much damage." Delmas obeyed and sure enough, he found his wife trying to beat out a fir. in the kitchen, where some clothes drying by the fire had caught alight. I ought to say that le sorcier was coming from the opposite direction and Delmas' house, being the other side of a large wood, and in a valley, could not be seen anyway.

'On another occasion there had been a theft - a thing that had not occurred in living memory. Our neighbour Chapon had left a basket of eggs by the roadside one morning intending to take them to market later in the day. When he went to pick them up, they were gone. He was mystified. Everyone was mystified. More than that. The district was greatly disturbed by the thought that one of the community had betrayed the trust that each had in his fellow's honesty. As a last resort Chapon decided to call in le sorcier. The old man told him to take up a mirror and he would see in it the face of the thief. To his surprise he saw the face of a man from Provence who lodged in the house and had been helping him with all the work on the farm and was a most conscientious worker. He could not believe it. Le sorcier said: "This man will come here in a few minutes with his face cut and bleeding, and he will confess."

'Sure enough, there was soon a knock at the door, the man walked in with his face and handkerchief covered with blood and said: "The Devil tempted me to take your eggs. I have brought them back. I have been punished by cutting

my face with the hook when cutting wood. Please

forgive."

'Chapon felt so relieved that he took the man in his arms and embraced him. Indeed, the whole community felt relieved and the sympathy of all went out to the poor man. Those who trust one another are aware of their own weakness and do not condemn others for theirs. "There is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner that repents than over ninety and nine rightcous who need no repentance." N'est-ce pas? And so there was in our commune a cloud, like a man's hand, that had come over the sky, had passed away below the horizon of our minds, leaving a memory but not a stain.

"The Wiseman's remedies for cattle were few and simple – and it seems to me that they must have been effective. I cannot recall any of our cattle dying of sickness. For their general health my father obeyed his instructions to keep a little salt in each corner of our two pastures. In case of any sign of cough or cold, we were counselled to collect pine shoots, put them in the bottom of an old comporte that did not leak, and crush them with a beetle. These were placed under the animal's head and boiling water was poured over them. A blanket was then spread over the animal's head and the comporte, so that it had to breathe the fumes from the pines. I used to put my head under the blanket and thought it was a very pleasant remedy.

For all internal complaints, human or animal, herbs of many kinds were his remedy. He used to pick these vers la Saint-Jean (Midsummer), for he said that they had their greatest potency then. . . . He had to be up very early to gather them, for they had to be picked before sunrise, so he said. Also one had to pick them while walking backwards. He did not explain the reason for this. We were admonished, so my father told me, to gather wild flowers in this fashion and at this season and to make a cross of them. This cross had to be set on the gateway at the entrance to the farmyard to prevent the Devil or any of his associates from entering and doing any mischief to qur livestock.

'When a calf was to be taken away from its dam to be sold in the market, it was most important that it should be backed out of the cowpen and not led out or its dam would pine away, and whenever he himself went to le marché on any business whatsoever, he made a point of cutting off a sliver of wood with his knife from the old wooden cross, that used to stand at the cross-roads at Pont de Causse. I suppose that this defeated Le Diable in some way or other.

'Many people had ideas then that are not common now, ideas that always seemed to me to be associated with le sorcier. He took charge of the making of a bonfire every Midsummer Day. On this given branches were put and flowers placed on top He used to collect the charcoal from this and used it in powdered form for digestive troubles. He also took firebrands from it to his house to preserve it from thunder. He did not like to hear the first call of the cuckoo in spring, unless he had already had breakfast, and he maintained that the call of the screech-owl from any house denoted an impending death in that house. He too was associated with the belief that the feux-follets (will-of-the-wisps) that were seen sometimes near the cemetery of the old priory and elsewhere were the souls of departed ones who were in trouble; and that shooting stars were the souls of children who had died before baptisın.

His greatest claim to fame, however, concerned his cure of the carpenter of Saint-Cybranet. This poor man developed a form of rheumatism that gradually spread all over his body and enlarged every joint, so that he could not do his work and later could not walk and after some years was so crippled that he could only lie in bed. The Wiseman had tried his charcoal of cherry, apple, plum, and other woods, he had tried treatment of individual herbs and of mixed herbs with great perseverance through the years, but the poor man did not improve. He became slowly worse, though he was in the prime of life and should have responded to one treatment or another.

'A desperate case needed evidently some drastic remedy. It was one of kill or cure. Le sorcier asked the carpenter's wife when she would be baking next and when the bread had been taken out of the oven, he got the help of a neighbour to carry the sufferer from his bed to the bakehouse. There they stripped him and wrapped a blanket round him completely, tying him with swaddling bands, so that he looked like a mummy. Then they put him into the oven feet first to be baked. The Wiseman listened intently to the breathing of his patient, and when it sounded as though he was on the point of suffocation, he was pulled out far enough to get more air, and when his breathing seemed to be normal again, he was pushed back into the oven and allowed to bake still more till his breathing again denoted the danger of suffocation. This process was continued till the Wiseman was satisfied that the rheumatism had been expelled, and the patient was carried back to his bed, where he laid for days in a high fever, eating nothing but demanding water, more water, and still more water. Eventually the fever passed and appetite slowly returned. Strength began to return and with it the outer skin of his whole body peeled off, just as a snake sloughs its skin. His body was as red as that of a boiled crayfish. His swollen joints had disappeared and in due time he was able to take up his work and never had another touch of rheumatism in a life that proved to be long.

'His wife was as thankful as the man himself. They could not reward the Wiseman sufficiently, they told him, if they gave him all that they possessed. At every visit they put before him the best that they had. He would drink a coup of wine or a little soup, explaining that he was old and did not need muc's. On his last visit when the carpenter was back at his bench, they pressed him to accept something, but he declined, saying:

"You and your husband will live many years and you will find a use for all that you have. I have no more needs. I am going home to die. Thank God for that which has befallen you."

'He embraced them both and went down the stone stairs. At the foot of them, he turned and smiled his farewell. He went home, ailing nothing and (his life's work done) passed away in his sleep.'

That was the end of grand-père's story.

Two Penguins by Françoise Sagan

BONJOUR TRISTESSE

1192

Bonjour Tristesse describes the indignation of a young girl at her father's plan to remarry, and her interference to prevent this change in their carefree way of living.

'This is not just a remarkable book for a girl to have written; it is a remarkable book absolutely. The virtuosity is dazzling throughout... She is marvellously gifted'—Sunday Times

'Mlle Sagan tells her story exquisitely in melodic, fastflowing prose that is ideally suited to the material... The book seems to me a considerable achievement, a work of art of much beauty and psychological perception' - New Statesman

A CERTAIN SMILE

1444

A young girl falls out of love with her student friend and into an entanglement with his uncle, a middle-aged man who deliberately sets out to attract her, even though he is happily married to a woman of great charm.

'Some of the writing can without exaggeration be compared with Stendhal' - The Times Literary Supplement.

'Done with such delicacy and charm and honest observation that the elderly will read it with nostalgic thankfulness that they are no longer young' - Daily Telegraph

"... strong, simple, and beautifully controlled" - Evening Standard.

NOT FOR SALE IN THE U.S.A. OR CANADA

Gabriel Chevallier

THE AFFAIRS OF FLAVIE+

The Affairs of Flavie is a memorable account of life in a French provincial town – the town of Grenoble.

M. Constant Euffe, a self-made millionaire and founder of the 'Silken Net' chain of grocery stores, is killed accidentally in the street, while on his way to visit his mistress, by a falling flower vase.

The heirs of M. Euffe make varying, extraordinary, and of course amusing uses of their inheritance.

CLOCHEMERLE*

797

The story of *Clochemerle* has been the rage of France for many years both as a novel and as a film. It is a candid, uninhibited comedy of the goings-on in a small provincial town, and of the fantastic feuds which developed from the decision to erect a public convenience near the parish church.

CLOCHEMERLE-BABYLON*

1275

The age of jazz has reached the heart of rural France, and the girls dance to new tunes. The age of motoring has also arrived. Eugene Fedet opens a garage; speeding becomes a danger to life and limb. Electricity, the telephone, and, above all, the cinema have a startling effect on manners which have remained unchanged for generations.

*NOT FOR SALE IN THE US A THOT FOR SALE IN THE US A. OR CANADA

GERALD DURRELL

My Family and Other Animals

This book is soaked in the sunshine of Corfu, where the author lived as a boy with his 'family and other animals'. It is a matter of taste whether one most enjoys the family or the animals Gerry studies and brings back to the villa. (1399)

The Bafut Beagles

The Bafut Beagles was the name which Gerald Durrell gave to the Africans and pack of mongrel dogs with which he hunted and captured many of the oddest and most clusive creatures in the Cameroons (1266)

The Pranken Forest

Once again Gerald Durrell is in quest of the odder small birds and animals, this time in the Argentinian pampas and the little explored Chaco territory of Paraguay. For good measure he throws in a remarkable collection of human beings (1344)

The Overloaded Ark

The story of a six months' collecting trip made by Gerald Durrell and John Yealland to the great rain forests of the Cameroons in West Africa, to bring back alive some of the fascinating animals, birds, and reptiles of the region, and to see one of the few parts of Africa that remained as it had been when the continent was first discovered. (1228)

'How seldom it is that books of this kind are written by those who can write!' - Time and Tide

PENGUIN BOOKS



James Gunn

Philip Oyler says: 'I was born on a Kentish farm in 1879, of a family that has farmed for tenturies. I have spent my life on the land and got my living from it – except for the waited years passed (very much against, my own desires) at a school and Oxford; negative years in which I learned only what not to do and how not to ligh.

I have managed extates in England and France. I have worked as farm labourer, as subtant, as owner. I have been responsible for anyelling from two acres of Intensive colling of the strain of growing the whell of the strain of the renumber any that the only renumber any that the only renumber any

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THE ALBATROSS BOOK OF LIVING VERSE